

# HOLLOW RINGS

BY JOHN W. KENNEDY

Bruce Collie realized early in high school that football could be his ticket to the material possessions he craved. After high school, the 6-foot-5-inch, 300-pound San Antonio, Texas, native received a full-ride scholarship to the University of Texas-Arlington, where he became an offensive tackle standout.

In 1985, the San Francisco 49ers — the team that had just won Super Bowl XIX — drafted Collie in the fifth round. For some reason, the team picked a wide receiver named Jerry Rice in the first round ahead of him. Rice and Collie turned out to be the only picks to make the team.

Collie was ecstatic about his generous salary his rookie season, and money became his primary motivator. His ride up the ladder of success continued in 1986 when he became an offensive starter. With some shrewd investing, Collie bought and paid off a new house plus six new vehicles.

Collie believed being on a winning Super Bowl team would be the pinnacle of his life. But he couldn't find fulfillment.

"No matter how many women I was with or how many drugs I did while partying, I couldn't fill this void," Collie remembers. "So I thought a Super Bowl ring would fix it."

In 1989, the 49ers defeated the Cincinnati Bengals 20-16 in one of the most thrilling Super Bowl finishes. Quarterback Joe Montana started San Francisco on a 92-yard drive late in the fourth quarter. The winning touchdown pass in Super Bowl XXIII came with 34 seconds left on the clock.

Collie received his 5½-carat ring.

BRUCE COLLIE



Nevertheless, he still felt inadequate because he didn't start on the offensive line in the big game. Collie believed he had to be a starter to find true fulfillment.

During the off-season he hired a trainer, and he reported to camp in great shape the next season. Collie won his right guard job back.

The 49ers returned to the Super Bowl, with Collie's image beamed to 600 million viewers on live television during player introductions. In the biggest blowout in the contest's history, San Francisco blasted the Denver Broncos 55-10 in Super Bowl XXIV in 1990.

Yet the euphoria soon wore off. Collie's salary had continued to balloon as he trudged out on football fields for 16 games a season. But he still had emptiness inside.

From training camp in Rocklin, Calif., a despondent Collie phoned his mother, Lexie, back in Texas. He told her that he wanted to quit. Mom always had talked to him about Jesus, but he never had listened. He'd been too busy living it up. Her response startled him.

"Son, what are you going to do with your life?" she asked.

*Wait a minute*, Collie thought. *Isn't life about having an investment portfolio? Isn't life having two houses paid off in San Francisco and San Antonio? Isn't life having the right clothes and the right friends?*

These impressions quickly ran through his head. But he had no verbal reply for his mom.

Then Lexie asked another question.

"Son, do you have a Bible?"

"I COULDN'T  
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## BRUCE COLLIE

**“I HAD EVERYTHING I WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE ON THE OUTSIDE, BUT ON THE INSIDE I WAS PERISHING.”**

Among his many belongings, Collie didn't own a Bible — even though he considered himself a Christian. After all, his mother loved Jesus a lot.

In reality, Collie only thought of God when in trouble. Like the time he got into a fight in a bar during college. Some of his teeth came through the skin on his face before doctors in an emergency room stitched him up. He still has the scars from that brawl. Yeah, he called on God then.

Then there was the time he was stabbed in a parking lot fight. He had to literally hold his intestines with one hand to keep them from spilling out while keeping his other hand on the steering wheel in the drive to a hospital. He remembered thinking, *Oh God, just get me through this one.*

With Lexie still on the line, Collie began to sob.

“Do you still have that backpack you brought to San Antonio?” Lexie asked her son. He did. She told him to unzip one of the inside pockets he never checked. Just before training camp, Lexie placed inside the backpack a book of the Psalms she had given to her 5-year-old son. On the front flap Lexie had inscribed, “To Bruce. I love you. Love, Mom. 1967.”

Collie began reading the first psalm: “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked.” He kept reading. When he reached the 23rd Psalm, Collie's persistent pattern of wrong behavior overwhelmed him. He got down on his knees and asked God to forgive him of his sins through the Cross and to live in his heart through Christ's resurrection from the dead.

“I had everything I was supposed to have on the outside, but on the inside I was perishing,” Collie recalls. “I had played a religion game with God and He knew it. He knew the intentions of my heart, yet He still wanted me to have a relationship with Him.”

Less than two weeks later, on the final day of the preseason, the 49ers traded Collie to the Philadelphia Eagles.

In Philadelphia, where he played starting right tackle, Collie formed a friendship with defensive end Reggie White. The ordained minister, known as “the Minister of Defense,” prayed with Collie every day and mentored him. Sexual activity, alcohol and illegal drugs had been part of Collie's routine. But as he studied the Scriptures together with White, Collie — who had arrived in New Orleans for the Super Bowl earlier in the year with strippers on each arm — had his thought life transformed. In studying 1 Corinthians 6 and 7, Collie understood God's ideal of marriage as well as the immorality of sexual activity with prostitutes.

Collie told White that he wanted to get married.

Three weeks later, in November 1990, Collie met Holly Mark of Media, Pa. As they went on a first date, Collie for the first time understood the meaning of courtship, shaking hands in saying

goodnight. Six weeks later, Collie proposed. Four weeks after that, the pair wed.

Holly gave up her high-salaried modeling job on the QVC network to be a wife.

Since then, the wild football player and the former TV model have had 11 children in 12 years. They homeschool the children.

Now 43, Collie spends several weekends a year hanging out with convicted murderers, rapists and drug traffickers. He is a speaker for Champions for Life, a prison ministry started in 1972 by Bill Glass, a former All-Pro lineman with the Cleveland Browns.

Working with dozens of volunteers from local churches, Champions for Life sets up a stage in the prison yard to draw men who would never enter the penitentiary's chapel.

“The whole point is to get them out of their cells,” Collie says. “They want to hear about football.”

The family travels a great deal in their 45-foot motor home, and many other weekends Collie is talking about his faith and fatherhood at churches.

“If I had even thought in July 1990 that today I would have 11 children and have been faithful to my wife for 15 years, it would have seemed crazy,” Collie says. “But God has a destiny for everyone. We must submit to Him for guidance.” **tpe**

JOHN W. KENNEDY is news editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

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