

Recovery: Double Meaning for Super Bowl Legend

Former New Orleans Saints football player Chris Reis didn't grow up, as many little boys do, wanting to be just like his father, Mike. Ironically, it was Mike who wanted to spend the rest of his adult life emulating his son's.

As the two detailed in their very poignant collaborative book, *Recovery of a Lifetime*, released in January (FS Publishing), Mike Reis was far from the ideal father or husband. He was rarely around for Chris' formative years, and he struggled with alcohol and sexual addiction that threw even more wedges into their relationship.

Chris Reis, raised mainly by his mother and famous for his recovery of the "Ambush" onside kick in Super Bowl XLIV that led to a New Orleans victory, became a Christian at the age of 18 and went on to play football at Georgia Tech University. After being drafted by the Atlanta Falcons of the NFL, Chris spent four seasons playing for the Saints, from 2007 to 2010, including a Super Bowl championship in his final year.

During that time, Chris' relationship with Jesus grew stronger, which caused his father to take notice.

Mike accepted Christ into his life in October 2005, and thought he was finally on the right path. However, he didn't completely surrender his life—or alcohol, still one of his main vices—to the Lord.

It wasn't until his arrest on a DUI charge, three weeks after Super Bowl XLIV, that Mike Reis drew the line. Enough was enough.

"Here I was, attending church and professing to be a man of God, but I was still behaving like one who didn't believe in

God at all,” Mike wrote in *Recovery of a Lifetime*. “I felt incredible shame and low self-respect. Once again, I had blown it. My son had just made the most famous recovery in Super Bowl history. Now I needed my own recovery—a recovery from my addiction to alcohol, sex and a life filled with bad choices and poor decisions.

“Little did I know how that play would change both our lives as father and son forever. Chris would be there again when I needed him most, and together we would make a recovery of a lifetime.”

The idea for the book came following Super Bowl XLIV. The ambush play, which shocked many—including the Indianapolis Colts—came at the beginning of the third quarter and helped spark the Saints to the victory. Having never been a starter, the play launched Chris into sports stardom for a short time.

Much more than that, however, Chris realized that God had a plan, and that he would be able to use the famous play for His purposes.

“I felt like God was calling me to use it as a platform,” Chris said. “I wasn’t sure where to go with it, but God gave me the title for the book. A couple of weeks later, dad got arrested for DUI, and I talked to him about doing the book with me. I believe that God gave us this vision to impact the world. It’s definitely a calling.”

A Rebellious Life

Mike was successful in the corporate world and had provided for his family. But, he was a failure at his most important relationships, including with the Lord—and with his two sons.

“Literally, I have had a very long and lucrative business career,” Mike said. “But when you come to realize that means nothing, it’s a very empty feeling. I cannot begin to fathom the hurt and pain that I put Chris, my other son Mike, and my

family through, and I can't take that back. I went through marriages, divorces, sex addiction, alcohol—you name it.

"After the DUI arrest, I finally realized that I couldn't do it on my own. I—and God—had to do something."

Mike grew up the son of an alcoholic father and a teenage mother. Forthright about his past in *Recovery of a Lifetime*, he was abused sexually by his grandmother and discovered sex at a very early age.

Mike learned the art of deceit in business from his father, James, at an early age. He recognized dishonesty, having learned right from wrong from his mother, Lois. He never knew what it meant to have self-esteem, having been ridiculed by his father and grandmother constantly as a child and teenager. His father "favored gambling and drinking to seeing his family."

When he discovered sex, women simply became objects of his desire. By the time his junior year of high school rolled around, "I felt like I could do anything I wanted," Mike wrote in the book.

Those attributes remained prevalent in Mike's personality throughout high school, through his college years at Georgia State University in the mid-1970s and through his marriage to his first wife, Stephanie, Chris' and Mike Jr.'s mother. It didn't take long for marital infidelity to rear its ugly head, and it didn't come with any remorse.

Although he became successful in the business world, Mike flunked out when it came to caring for his family. Mike and Stephanie later divorced, and he ended up divorcing his second wife as well.

Road to Recovery

While he could pass the buck and chalk those things up to

generational sin, Mike chooses not to. The decision to collaborate with his son on a book so revealing and transparent wasn't an easy one, either.

"Generational curse, or whatever you want to call it, is not an excuse," he said. "You still have a choice as to what you are doing. God has called me to shine a light on that sin. On a personal level, I struggled a lot with it.

"My biggest fear is that I had to tell Chris some things that a father shouldn't tell a son. I was afraid he wasn't going to love me. It was very difficult, humiliating and embarrassing, but Chris was very supportive and loved me anyway."

If Mike was going to stop drinking, he knew he couldn't do it alone. He turned to his family, including his third wife, Celia, and he went cold turkey. He attended Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. He hasn't had an alcoholic drink since February 20, 2010—the night of his DUI.

Mike began to dive into God's Word, with the help of his friend, Larry Roberts. And after a two-day stay in jail (one of the penalties for his DUI), his faith in God, his marriage and his sobriety were all intact. Although he later lost his job at ConAgra Foods, he found another one at age 52.

"I kept plugging away, day by day, week by week, striving to live intentionally for God and do the right thing each and every day," Mike wrote in *Recovery*.

Mike has since earned professional coach certifications in addiction recovery and Christian Life, and leads a Self-Management and Recovery Training group in Cumming, Ga.

Chris' NFL career ended in 2011 when the Saints cut him. "I was OK with being cut because I was thankful to God that he had put me in that role for so long," Chris said. "I wanted to be a pro athlete for longer, and it was hard to give it up. But God has called me to do something else now."

Chris now travels the country speaking to men's groups, churches and religious organizations, rotary clubs, youth groups and corporations, inspiring others by sharing his story of living a faith-based lifestyle in an egocentric culture. He is grateful for his faith, but he is also most grateful for the healed relationship with his father.

"It's the best it's ever been," Chris said. "The relationship we had before simply was on the surface level because he wasn't around. He had no roots to me or my brother. Our relationship has done a complete 180-degree turn. It's worth everything we've been through to get to this point.

"I hope that, by people reading *Recovery*, there are fathers and sons out there that will experience the same healing. That, however, will only come by the grace of God."

For more information on speaking engagements for Chris, visit his website . *Recovery of a Lifetime* can be purchased online at and on .