Following: What an Olympic Journey Taught Me About Walking With God

Discover how to worry less, live with greater peace, and find a deeper joy and purpose that don't depend on your circumstances or accomplishments.

As a four-time Olympian, I learned the power of commitment, coaching, training, trust, and perseverance.

But following Jesus taught me something even greater: Life's greatest victory isn't what I accomplish in my own strength. It's what Jesus does in me and through me when I stay close to Him.

This book will help you stop trying to do everything yourself and experience the freedom, peace, and joy of walking with Jesus every day.

How this Book Came to Be

From My Head to My Heart

God used a soccer ball and science to save me. I know. It sounds like the beginning of a joke. A soccer player, a chemistry student, and a walk into a student center. But that's pretty much what happened.

I went to Houston Christian University because they had a great soccer program. The Christian part had nothing to do with it. I wasn't a believer.

I was a walk-on soccer player and a pre-med student majoring in chemistry and biology, trying to figure out what I was going to do with my life.

One day, this student sat down beside me in the Student Center and said, "You're on the soccer team, right?" Yeah. "You're in my chemistry class." Okay. Then he started asking me questions about science, faith, God, and the Bible.

He wasn't pushy. He wasn't trying to win an argument or turn me into his latest evangelism project. He was simply curious and friendly. Then he did something that made all the difference: he became my friend.

For about a year and a half, we talked. We talked about science and the Bible. We talked about whether God was real and whether Christianity made sense. We talked about Jesus. I asked questions—lots of questions—and he didn't panic when I asked hard ones. He didn't pretend to know everything. He just kept talking with me, listening to me, and pointing me toward Jesus.

Looking back, I can see what was happening. My friend was planting seeds, and God was doing something underneath the surface that neither one of us could do, he was making those seeds grow.

About eighteen months later, I said yes to Jesus. I still have the Bible I received in 1982. That Bible has been with me a long time, but here's the strange part of my story: for years, much of my faith still lived in my head.

I believed in Jesus. I went to church. I read the Bible. I knew what I believed and could talk about God. But my default operating system was still Ruben. Work harder. Figure it out. Solve the problem. Push through. Don't quit.

To be fair, that operating system had worked pretty well for me. I was twenty-one when I decided I wanted to become an Olympian, even though I'd never been on a luge sled. Four years later, I was competing in the Olympics. Persistence had changed my life, so naturally I thought persistence was the answer to pretty much everything. Give me a problem and I'll find a bigger hammer.

Then life handed me something I couldn't hammer.

In 2024, I entered what became the hardest season of my life. I lost what I had spent twenty-five years building through my speaking career. Suddenly, the guy who stood on stages teaching people how to overcome obstacles was staring at an obstacle he couldn't muscle his way around. There was some irony there. I appreciated the humor slightly less while living through it.

I knew how to fight. God was teaching me how to surrender. And I preferred fighting.

Fighting gave me something to do. Surrender felt like letting go of the steering wheel and trusting Somebody else to drive. For a guy who had spent his life setting goals, making plans, and refusing to quit, this was not exactly my specialty.

Around that time, a friend gave me a simple daily devotional - *Jesus Calling*, by Sarah Young. The readings were short. Trust Jesus. Stay close to Him. Stop carrying everything yourself. Remember that He is with you. Nothing complicated. I'd heard those truths many times before, but now I had ears to hear them because I desperately needed them.

I started reading more. I journaled. I prayed differently. I dug deeper into Scripture, not because I wanted more Bible trivia or another spiritual accomplishment to add to the scoreboard. I needed oxygen. I needed Jesus.

Somewhere during those months, almost quietly, my faith moved about eighteen inches —from my head to my heart. My circumstances hadn't magically improved. There was no movie scene where the clouds opened, inspirational music started playing, and everything I had lost suddenly came flying back. What changed was me.

I began to realize I wasn't alone. God was with me—not theoretically, not as a nice Christian sentence, but really with me. And somehow, deep down, I started knowing I was going to be okay.

That peace became more valuable to me than everything I had lost. If you told me I had to go through that chapter again to know Jesus the way I know Him now, I would. Ten times over. I wouldn't enjoy it, so let's not get carried away. But I'd do it because what I found in that season was worth more than what the season took from me.

That's why I'm writing this book. Not as a theologian and certainly not as somebody who has God completely figured out. I'm writing as a guy who believed in Jesus for decades and then discovered there was still so much more of Him to know.

Maybe you're there too. Maybe you believe all the right things but you're exhausted from carrying everything yourself. Maybe life has knocked the wind out of you. Maybe you have questions. Keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep following. Jesus isn't asking you to have everything figured out before you walk with Him. He's simply saying what He has always said: "Follow Me."

I spent most of my life trying to become unstoppable.
Now I'm discovering something much better.

I don't have to be unstoppable. I just have to stay close to the One who is.

My Challenge to you:

Read this book slowly and honestly, and don't be afraid to wrestle with the questions it raises. If you have questions along the way, email me. I'm still asking questions too—and I'd love to walk with you.

Ruben Gonzalez

Jesus, help me trust You with what I cannot control, stay close to You, and let Your presence move my faith from my head to my heart.

"Come close to God, and God will come close to you."

James 4:8

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