

F O L L O W

M E

THE UNRAVELING
OF CHRISTIANITY

FOLLOW
ME

THE UNRAVELING
OF CHRISTIANITY

TONY IZUGU

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DEDICATION

I THANK GOD ALWAYS FOR the grace to study, learn, and teach his word to the world—more so for the ability to make it into a book.

To my wife, Ugo, and my little angels, Ify, Alex, Jane, and Iyke—you are bundles of blessings to my life.



CONTENTS

Dedication	v
Introduction.	9
Chapters:	
1. From Vision to Freedom	13
2. Who Are They	19
3. Your Cross	23
4. Fishers of Men	27
5. Who Is He	31
6. What Does It Mean	51
7. Humility	57
8. Obedience	65
9. Discipline.	75
10. Love	83

FOLLOW ME

11. Charity	91
12. Faith	105
13. Forgiveness	121
14. Service	131
15. Faithfulness	137
16. Diligence	147
17. Perseverance	153
18. Patience	161



INTRODUCTION

I HAVE A VERY SELF-CONSCIOUS personality with an insatiable quest for answers to happenings around me and things beyond normal human grasp. It was my preoccupation with trying to make sense of existence and how best I could align with and serve the divine purpose of life that ignited my search for God.

My personal experience with God started in my teenage years. And I quickly found out that I not only wanted to discover God and be a potent tool in his hands, but I also automatically developed the passion to share the knowledge I gather with the world.

I have over twenty years' experience in church ministry. In that time, I have worked as a Bible teacher, chorister, choir leader, and worship leader in various churches as I moved through cities and countries across three continents.

FOLLOW ME

Following regular detailed study of the Bible and so many other Christian resources in pursuit of the knowledge of God, his ways, and the lives of other people (especially in the Bible) in their vocations and experiences with God, and in discharge of my responsibilities in the various roles I have played in church ministry, I learned so much.

However, all the Christian books I have authored (published and yet-to-be-published) have come about as revelations. Most writers experience a book idea dropping into their hearts and minds from nowhere while in the middle of something else (including dreams and sleep consciousness), and they are inspired to start writing or to develop their ideas. The book, *Follow Me*, followed that pattern.

Here's the thing: I came to the realization that at the heart of Christian spirituality, no personality stands more central than Jesus Christ. And I quickly realized that a good walk with God would be impossible without first understanding the mission and character of Jesus and then adapting to them. I strongly believe that the coming of Jesus Christ had two important, closely tied functions and that we have not been paying sufficient attention to one aspect, hence our inability to attain certain vital targets in our divine experience.

This book will provide readers with what we all need to know and do to derive the complete benefits of our Christian life. Nobody writes a particular book for everybody! That said, this book, if properly read, will afford mature Christians resources to streamline their lifestyles and reinforce positive actions, and new converts will find it to be a firm foundation and very reliable direction in their march toward maturity. Part

of the reason is that this book has been written without any church doctrinal bias and has focused on the unadulterated principles of sound Christian spirituality.

Follow Me is broken into parts 1 and 2. Part 1 establishes the mission of Jesus Christ on earth, the way he went about it, and who he is to us. Part 2 discusses his inherent character and what it means in practice for us to follow him. Additionally, every chapter in part 2 offers tips to help us achieve the required character components exemplified by Jesus. Read it with an open, truth-seeking, and knowledge-hungry mind, and you will be glad you did.



CHAPTER 1

FROM VISION TO FREEDOM

A KING HAD THE LEADER of a new religious movement put in a supermax prison. The prisoner was awaiting trial as part of a ruthless crackdown on his group deemed dangerous by the government. Despite the structural fortification of the prison (it had layers of barriers), sixteen heavily armed military men were stationed to guard this one prisoner. The prisoner was so high profile and considered so fluid and deadly, that for him to sleep, even when inside this highly protected facility, he was chained between two soldiers, while a number of other soldiers stood sentry at the entrance of the locked prison cell. Not even detainees at Guantanamo Bay prison were so detained.

No person could escape from such an imprisonment without assistance from the soldiers. But it took this prisoner only a few minutes to beat all that security to escape from this prison. He had no help from any soldier or warden; no shots were

fired; no violence occurred. This was not a scene from the movie, *Alcatraz*. It was an actual occurrence in Acts of the Apostles, chapter 12, verses 1–10.

To Herod and the rest of his men, Peter's escape must have been shockingly mysterious. When the angel met Peter chained in the cell, he had just one instruction: "Follow me!" That was all Peter needed to do to regain his freedom in an awesome manner.

Peter thought he was dreaming. And if he was asked where they were going, I imagine his answer would have been, "Heaven." But that would be justified; his condition was grave, and it wouldn't be impossible to hallucinate. He was just one man, imprisoned, chained, and yet guarded by a whole lot of soldiers.

By the way, this is a different Peter—not the same man who first argued when Jesus told him to cast his net for a catch (Luke 5:5). Peter had learned; he had grown! One thing is clear: until after the last lap, Peter thought he was dreaming. Miracles overwhelm human senses and expectations.

Tired of and bored by the orthodox routine of Catholic masses and coupled with my teenage rebellious quest for personal religious freedom from my deeply Catholic family and conservative father, I sought another church that would feed my growing curiosity for spirituality. It didn't take long; I was drawn by the constant gospel songs from a nearby church. I quickly located the church and after attending just one Sunday service, I was moved enough to decide to pitch my tent there.

As I celebrated and enjoyed my new find, I faced stiff opposition from my very controlling father. He wouldn't have it!

The manner he went about opposing and trying to force me back into the Catholic church made it seem as if I had joined Al-Qaeda or ISIS; it was (and still is) usual for orthodox Christians to view Pentecostal counterparts as intoxicated rebels who should be kept at arms' length.

Then one time, my church had a week-long seminar, and as a committed church worker, I was required to stay late to help organize this important event. On one of those days, we concluded the church meeting very late at night. Home was just about five blocks away, but how could I get home past 7:00 p.m. with my father keeping surveillance on me? At 11:00 p.m., I was still at church, and everyone had gone home. I decided to pass the night in the church. The church had only rough metal chairs in an open space, but for me, it was better to face that dark, cold, and mosquito-infested place than the waiting wrath of my father. After just half an hour into my attempt to pass the night at the church in those cruel conditions, I had enough of the relentless mosquitoes and the cold. I decided to go home and face whatever consequences I knew awaited me. There was no way of sneaking into our house. We had a metal gate that was always locked with a large noisy chain. To get in, I would need to tap the gate with a stone loudly enough to draw the attention of anyone inside the big house. As I walked home in the dreadful darkness, I was trying to prepare myself for the yelling and beating that was sure to befall me.

When I got to our gate, what I saw made me wipe my cold hands over my face more than once. It was past midnight, and our gate was wide open—full length! I walked in and then saw my father reclined on a balcony sofa deep asleep. In spite of the

noise of my feet, he didn't wake. Now, apart from myself, he was the lightest sleeper I have ever known. What of our vigilant dog that would bark at the slightest noise at night? He lay sleeping, completely oblivious. Another thing: the main door of the house was also left unlocked. I got into the house and then came back outside, staring at the whole scenario in utter disbelief. I got crafty. I stamped my foot to make some noise. It was then my father woke and asked, "Who is there?" I responded that it was me. The next thing he said in a calm sleepy voice was, "My son, please go and lock the gate and go to bed; I am going to bed now." Incredible! Something was definitely off about it all. It was miraculous. The psalmist was right: "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream" (Ps. 126:1 KJV).

More often than not, we wish for God to deal with us like he dealt with Peter and several others in the Bible. However, God has said of Jesus, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17 KJV). As if not enough, he repeated it a second time adding something very important, something that explains his verbal attestation of Jesus: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matt. 17:5).

Note that Jesus is the only one in the whole Bible of whom God made such a strong, direct, explicit, and unqualified claim. David was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam.13:14), Abraham was a friend of God (James 2:23), and Gideon was a "mighty man of valour" (Judg. 6:12 KJV). But of Jesus he said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

Mary, the lovely mother of Jesus equally spoke of him. She said, “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5).

God, Mary, and others have in separate situations instructed us to hear and do whatever Jesus asks us to do; it means that this Jesus has something to tell us. And Jesus said, “Follow me!” He didn’t stop at that; he emphasized “Whoever does not . . . follow me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:38).

God and his Son are one (John 10:30)! It then follows that if his Son has rejected you (because of your disloyalty and disobedience), then God has also automatically rejected you. Jesus said, “Whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16).