

WEEK 1: Always Reliable

We live in an extremely unreliable world. It is the expected norm that no person or institution is actually reliable. Friends and family fail us, companies we work for desert us, governments we elected betray us, churches we supported hurt us. We ourselves betray, abandon and fail others around us. As time goes by, people, governments, demographics and even climates change, making our world even more unreliable.

But there is One who has always been reliable, who has kept all His promises and never deserted those who put their trust in him: Jesus, the only truly righteous and reliable person who ever lived in our unreliable world.

13 years ago, on December 6, I decided to leave Islam and follow Jesus. Since then, I have gone through a lot of rejection, persecution and trials. As I was following Jesus, I experienced both the favour and the wrath of people. At times, I was an obedient follower of Jesus, at other times I disobeyed Him. But He never abandoned me, never turned His back on me. He kept all His promises, even when I did not keep mine. He became my best and most reliable friend. Similarly, throughout the history Jesus kept all His promises and never abandoned His people.

Taste and see that Jesus is good, that His love and faithfulness endure forever (Psalm 34:8; 100:5). He is always a reliable refuge and stronghold for His people (Nahum 1:7; Joel 3:16).

WEEK 2: Abraham's Friend

“...’Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’—and he was called a friend of God.” (James 2:23, ESV)

Abraham's life was marked with his friendship with God. His was not just a religion but a radical trust in God. His journey started in Genesis 12 as he stepped into the unknown in obedience to God. For the rest of his life, he always depended on God for protection, guidance and provision. Although he was a wealthy man, he was also a broken man before God. He was a stranger in strange countries, unable to protect himself and unable to have his own children. Although he had many workers, he did not seem to have many friends. Even his wife could not fully share and support his faith and obedience to God (Genesis 18:10-15). His extraordinary faith and obedience to God made this strange and broken man even more of a stranger. However, in the midst of all, God became his friend (Isaiah 41:8). So much so that God would visit Abraham and discuss His plans with him (Genesis 18). As a faithful friend, God sustained, protected and guided him throughout the years.

Your faith and obedience to God might make you unpopular, strange and lonely. In those times, remember who called you, and who sustains and guides you. God is your eternal friend. Trust in Him and pour out your heart to Him.

WEEK 3: Perseverance

“Blessed is the man who endures temptation.” (James 1:12, NKJV)

Temptations, trials and persecutions are guaranteed parts of Christian life. As Paul said, *“all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”* (2 Timothy 3:16). In other words, Christianity is not a game, nor a club for lazy ‘happy clappers’. It is tough, it is difficult, and it requires perseverance and faith even in the shadow of death.

When God calls you to do something, there will surely come various kinds of temptations, trials and even persecution on your way. God will allow such hardships to come against you to test you. All men and women of God face them. Jesus had to persevere hardships and, ultimately, death on the cross, in order to fulfil God's plan. For many years, the apostle Paul persevered despite all kinds of hardships and persecution while doing God's will. Christian history is filled with men and women of God who suffered all kinds of hardship and who persevered instead of giving up.

If you want to serve God and do what He has called you to do, you have to choose this life of perseverance and determination, enduring all temptation and hardships.

Jesus, help us to keep our eyes on You so that we may fulfil Your plans. Help us to serve You with determination and perseverance as You did. Amen.

WEEK 4: Faith without works is dead

“You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” (James 2:19-20)

It is practical faith that gives life, not theoretical faith. If your faith in God is only a theory, it is good for nothing. True faith is practical and fruitful. If you are only a spectator Christian – scared or unwilling to take a step forward, to make a stand for what you believe, to take risks, to be politically incorrect – then, I am sorry to say, your theoretical Christianity is fruitless and your faith useless.

True faith demands action. Be bold! Take a step forward! Stand up for what you believe! Otherwise, do not even call yourself a Christian. Only those who stand up for what they believe can influence and change the world. Only those who take risks and step forward in faith can be the salt and the light in this dark and suffering world. Only those who are willing to fight spiritual battles can win victories. All the rest will go down in history as ‘theoretical Christians’.

Jesus, help me to be a practical Christian, not theoretical. Help me, Jesus, to be bold and to stand up for Your truth. Help me to step forward and do what You called me to do. Amen.

WEEK 5: Friends and enemies

“You adulterers! Don’t you know that friendship with the world means hostility with God? So whoever wants to be a friend of this world is an enemy of God.” (James 4:4)

According to a commentary on this verse, the word “adulterers” in this context refers to people who are unfaithful to God’s covenant. And this warning is applicable to everyone: one cannot embrace and promote the principles and values of this world and still be a friend of God – one is either a man of God or a man of this world. One cannot claim to be Christian and at the same time promote the things God hates. One is either God's enemy or God's friend based on his decision to favour the values of God or the values of the world.

Sadly, in our post-modern world, there are many nominal Christians who are pro-world and anti-Bible. They support the politically correct ideas of the world against the radical teachings of the Bible. Thus, no matter how much they claim to be Christian, they are the friends of this world and enemies of God. Only those who obey and promote the Bible's teachings and the values of God are friends of God and true Christians.

Father God, give me reverence and fear for You. Bless me with an undiluted commitment to You and all Your principles and values. May I be faithful to You and your Word.

WEEK 6: A fruitful faith

“... make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they will keep you from being useless or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1: 5-8, HCSB)

Faith is a gift from God and it is the primary need in our lives. However, we still need to work on adding other qualities (mentioned in the passage above) to our faith. We need to actively develop and make these things part of our lives, in order to be fruitful servants of Christ: goodness (“virtue” in some translations), knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, brotherly affection and love.

Often, these qualities are contrary to our nature, our culture and our default behavioural patterns. Thus, intentional work and prayer is required to make them part of who we are. Without these qualities, our faith and knowledge of Christ will remain theoretical, unable to produce fruit in our own lives and in our circles of influence.

As James wrote, “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20), and faith without these other qualities is as fruitless as a dead and dry tree. In comparison, the man who adds to his faith these qualities is like a fruitful tree by streams of water bearing lots of fruit in season (Psalm 1: 1-3).

Father, thank You for blessing me with faith in Christ. Please help me also to add these qualities to my faith and my personality so that I may lead a fruitful life for You.

WEEK 7: Salt and light

“You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world...” (Matthew 5:13-14, ESV 2011)

In the way that salt is used to preserve and make food tastier, Jesus wanted His followers to act as ‘preserving’ and ‘flavouring’ agents in this constantly decaying and tasteless world. In the way that light chases away darkness and makes places pleasant and habitable, God meant for Christians to be light in this dark, corrupt and sinful world.

Since the days of Christ, God has used many Christians as salt and light in the world: working in the fields of democracy, healthcare and education, and fighting for the equality and freedom of all men. God used Christians like William Wilberforce to fight against the slave trade. He used Christians like George Muller to establish orphanages and care for abandoned children. He used Christians like Corrie Ten Boom to protect and shelter Jews from the Nazis during WWII. Today, God is using many Christians to shelter and provide for Syrian war victims.

What is your role in God's work? Where does God want you to be salt and light?

Father God, use me as salt and light in this dark and bitter world. Use me to preserve what is good and pleasant and to fight against what is evil. Amen.

WEEK 8: God's Servant

“I have found David, My servant; with My holy oil I have anointed him, so that My hand shall be established with him; My arm also shall strengthen him.” (Psalm 89:20-21, ESV 2011)

God found, anointed and empowered the shepherd boy David to kill Goliath, to rule the nation of Israel and to pave the way for the Messiah. Although he made mistakes, David lived for God, worked for God, fought for God and left behind a great legacy and a great kingdom.

But was David merely an obedient servant who did what God said, or was he more than that? The answer is found in Acts 13:22 – David was not only a servant, but a man after God's heart who sought to do all of God's will. He was not merely obeying God, but passionately trying to fulfil God's desires. He was not merely a labourer, but a 'man of God'. He did not just put in his labour, but gave his heart and all he had to see God's will done.

That is the kind of servant God looks for. If you work for a corporation, it will be enough if you put in your expertise and labour. But if you work for God, your expertise, labour and even your obedience will not be enough – first and foremost, you must give your heart as David did.

Lord, may You give me Your heart, passion and desires so that I may be a man after Your own heart.

WEEK 9: Love for God's people

“Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brothers, for he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people.” (Esther 10:3, ESV 2011)

Mordecai cared enough to take and raise Esther when her parents died (Esther 2:7). He faithfully served King Ahasuerus and saved him from a possible assassination (Esther 2:19-23). When Haman decreed the destruction of all Jews, Mordecai stepped forward and eventually saved his people (Esther 4).

Mordecai did not only love God, but he also loved God's people to the extent of taking risks to save them. His love for Esther led him to take and raise her as his own child. His love for God's people led him to face the enemy in order to stop the massacre of God's people.

There is so much for us to learn from the legacy of Mordecai. Many of us claim to love God and our neighbours. But do we love God's people to the extent of facing the enemy to save them?

Today, Christianity and Christians are attacked from every corner – intellectually, physically, politically and economically. There is so much need for Christians to be like Mordecai, standing against lies, deceptions, accusations and all kinds of attacks towards God's people.

Father, forgive my selfishness and cowardice. May I love and stand up for Your people. Bless me with love for them and boldness to defend them.

WEEK 10: Speak Up

“For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14, ESV 2011)

Jews were facing total destruction from Haman. And although Esther – safe in the king’s palace – was not Haman's immediate target, she was called to speak up for others.

Similarly, today, millions of Christians across the world face persecution on a daily basis. But there are also millions of Christians in the ‘free world’, as safe as Esther was in the palace. Just like Esther, we are also called to speak up for the relief and deliverance of God's people.

Our safety and freedom should not make us indifferent to the sufferings of other Christians. On the contrary, we should see freedom and safety as God's opportunity to stand up and speak against the atrocities committed against God's people across the world. We should use freedom to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, to defend those who cannot defend themselves, to fight for those who cannot fight for themselves.

Perhaps God put you in your place at this moment in history so that you may speak up and defend suffering Christians. Also remember this aspect of Mordecai’s warning: if you keep silent when you have the opportunity to make a difference (e.g. being an agent of God's relief and deliverance for His people), it will be to your loss.

WEEK 11: Submission in Prayer

“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” (Matthew 26:39, ESV 2011)

Although Jesus was God, He was also man. He came earth to do God's will, but He also knew the great suffering and humiliation that He was going to face. Thus He prayed: *“My Father, if it be possible, let this*

cup pass from Me..."

But Jesus was humble and submissive in His prayer. He ended with "... *nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.*" That is what I call submissive prayer. It is exactly the opposite of stubborn prayer, where one stubbornly asks God for what he or she wants and never even thinks about God's will.

Essentially, submissive prayer is God-centred, while stubborn prayer is self-centred. Submissive prayer sees God as the King of universe to whom we must submit; stubborn prayer sees God as a 'sugar daddy' in the heavens, whose job is to give us all we ask. Submissive prayer is about God and what God wants; stubborn prayer is selfish and arrogant and all about us and what we want.

Paul's testimony in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 is another good example of submissive prayer. Jesus and Paul did not rebel against God when their requests were not granted – they simply submitted to Father's decision.

Heavenly Father, teach me to pray not stubbornly but submissively. May I be God-centred and not self-centred in my prayers.

WEEK 12: Unselfish Commitment

"Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." (Matthew 10:37-39, ESV 2011)

This might sound rather difficult to accept, but this is exactly what Christ demands from His followers: unselfish love, unselfish commitment. If you cannot value Christ more than your own life, if you cannot love Him more than all your family, friends and everything else, you are not worthy of Him. That means you should not even call yourself Christian if your life is not totally and unconditionally committed to Christ.

In the post-modern Western culture, there is a great tendency to make Christianity as cheap and as easy as possible: a 'consumer friendly' or 'politically correct' Christianity. Sadly, Christianity is portrayed by many popular preachers and authors as a mere lip service to God or as a self-help gimmick. However, this Western way of understanding and promoting Christianity is neither biblical nor in line with Christ's calling. True – and truly biblical – Christianity starts and ends with a radical commitment and undiluted love for Christ.

Jesus please forgive me for my selfish Christianity and half-hearted commitment to You. Jesus, today I decide to love You more than all, and commit myself to You totally and unconditionally.

WEEK 13: Fear and Serve God

“Only fear the LORD and serve Him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things He has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.” (1 Samuel 12: 24-25)

“Fear the Lord! Serve the Lord!” These are not very common teachings in many Western churches any more. Rather, God is presented as a ‘sugar daddy’. Christianity became more about what can we get from God to spoil ourselves instead of fearing and serving God. However, the concepts of fearing and serving the Lord dominated both the Old and the New Testaments. The lives of many great men of God like Moses, David, Peter and Paul were all marked by their fear of God and service to God.

Solomon concluded his analysis of life's experiences and life's meaning with *“fear God and keep His commandments...”* (Ecclesiastes 12:13, NKJV). Jesus' parable of the talents teaches about serving God with fear (Matthew 25:14-30). Likewise, Paul's teaching on the gifts of the Holy Spirit also implies our responsibility to serve God according to our calling and gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-11).

In conclusion, Christian life is a life of fearing and serving God as much as growing in God's love and grace. Do not be fooled by the self-centred, ‘feel good’ sermons or ‘consumer friendly’ teachings of prosperity preachers. You are here to fear and serve God.

WEEK 14: Wise and innocent

“Jesus said: ‘Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.’” (Matthew 10:16)

Although this verse is well known and often quoted among Christians, it is debatable whether we are really wise. During the last hundred years in particular, Western Christians did not really act very wisely in terms of discerning and responding to many global issues such as Islam, post-modernism, homosexuality, human-trafficking and even slavery.

“To be wise means to be marked by understanding of people and situations, to have keen and unusual discernment, and a capacity for sound judgement in dealing with people and situations” (John McClain). As Christians, it is our responsibility to analyse and discern situations and people with an unusual wisdom and to respond with Biblical principles.

Where do you invest your money? What companies and organisations do you support and work with? What political party do you vote for? In other words, who do you empower? If you empower people and organisations that oppose Biblical principles, one day you will find yourself in an ungodly world. If you empower the persecutors of Christians, one day you could see Christianity becoming ‘illegal’ in your country.

Jesus, please help me to be as wise as a serpent, to discern with unusual understanding, and to respond with Biblical principles. I want to empower those who serve You and uphold Your principles.

WEEK 15: Love and Responsibility

“We have come to know love by this: that Jesus laid down His life for us; thus we ought to lay down our lives for our fellow Christians. But whoever has the world’s possessions and sees his fellow Christian in need and shuts off his compassion against him, how can the love of God reside in such a person?” (1 John 3:16-17, NET).

Wow, what a challenging statement!

If one truly loves God and if one is indeed a true Christian, then he needs to do as Christ did: to lay down his life for other Christians. In our post-modern and self-centred Western culture, this statement sounds difficult and even unacceptable. But whether you like it or not, this is what God said and this is what God meant. If God expected His own Son to lay down His life for sinful men, why should He not expect the same from you? What makes you more valuable than Christ?

However, even your willingness to lay down your life is not enough – you must also be willing to lay down your possessions for the good of other Christians. How can you claim to know and love God if you are indifferent to the sufferings and needs of other Christians while you lead a luxurious and comfortable life?

May the Lord give us love and concern for fellow Christians who are in need and suffering. May we act as Christ did; laying down our possessions and lives for God's people.

WEEK 16: Defending Knowledge of God

“For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5, ESV 2011)

Although we live in a physical world and operate in physical bodies, we are all part of a spiritual battle. Some of us are more aware of it than others. And some people ‘stand against’ God and His kingdom simply by their ignorance. Perhaps they never consciously choose to believe and promote lies. Some others, though, are more aware of this battle and are careful to position themselves with God.

Paul was one of these. Not only did he choose to position himself with God, he also made it his aim to destroy every “argument and lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God”. I am convinced that this should be our aim too. We should not keep silent when others distort the knowledge of God and teach false information about who God is. We should not remain silent when unbiblical doctrines lead nations into deception.

Remaining silent will position us with Satan and will promote his lies. Instead, as Paul wrote, we ought to destroy every “argument and lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God”.

WEEK 17: Walking with God

“Enoch was 65 years old when he fathered Methuselah. And after the birth of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and fathered other sons and daughters. So Enoch’s life lasted 365 years. Enoch walked with God; then he was not there because God took him.” (Genesis 5:21-24, HCSB)

Wow, what a testimony. In these verses, God is testifying to the faithfulness of a man called Enoch. At the age of 65, he started walking with God and for 300 years he remained faithful to God. Another translation (ISV) says “Enoch communed with God for 300 years.” Since the day he met God, Enoch walked with God, communed with God and remained faithful to God until the end of his life on earth.

When I read this passage, I just admire the steadfast faithfulness of this man. I wish and desire that I may also remain faithful to God and walk with God until the day He calls me home.

Life on earth is filled with various temptations, challenges and opportunities. Very often, many of us get too busy with these challenges, opportunities and temptations and tend to forget the most important aspect of our lives: walking with God. Firstly, and most importantly, life is an opportunity to commune and walk with God. Let us make the most of this great opportunity.

Dear Lord, help us fix our eyes on You, tune our hearts to You, and walk with You day by day until the very end. Let us commune with You year after year as Enoch did. Amen.

WEEK 18: Present Your Case to God

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:4-7, ESV 2011)

It is easy to rejoice when things go well. But it is not so easy to rejoice when our people suffer unemployment, our national resources are plundered by corrupt politicians, quality of education at our schools drop to alarming levels, our churches are infiltrated by unbiblical doctrines and practices, and our youth is hopeless, helpless and confused.

In times such as this, Paul's letter to Philippians becomes our secret weapon.

Our God is still in control and He is still almighty. We shall bring our people, our country and all our concerns to God with a sincere prayer and know that He hears us and will respond according to His plans. Then we shall receive the peace and joy of God that transcends all understanding.

Come present your case to God. Bring your country, nation and problems to God. He is still in control. In your prayers this week, do not concentrate on your personal issues so much, but intercede for your country and nation and God's Church in your country.

WEEK 19: Priorities

“So don’t worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For the idolaters eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.” (Matthew 6:31-33, HCSB)

Our concerns are the best indicators of our priorities – we are concerned or worried about the things we prioritise. According to these words of Jesus, believers should not worry about material things such as food and clothing but should rather seek God's kingdom.

Naturally, money and material things are a top priority for mankind. To get these things, people work hard or steal or even wage wars against one another. But at the end of the day, all people seek the material things of this world. Jesus, however, is saying that we should prioritise God's kingdom above all these things. Money and material things might be a top priority for most people in the world, but God's kingdom should be the top priority for Christians. At the same time, Jesus assures us that He will provide for our needs as we prioritise and serve His kingdom.

In our Western world, many Christians still hold money and material things as a priority, while claiming to be Kingdom-minded. Let us check our hearts and lifestyles, repent, and reprioritise when we have had a wrong focus.

WEEK 20: Psalm 67

“May God be gracious to us and bless us; look on us with favour so that Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations. Let the peoples praise You, God; let all the peoples praise You.” (Psalm 67:1-3, HCSB)

This was the Psalmist’s prayer for the house of Israel. In the same way, we can pray for the body of Christ: that God graciously bless us, protect us and treat us with favour and kindness. However, the ultimate objective of this prayer is not a selfish concern about ourselves and our desires. Quite the contrary – we pray in this way because we want to glorify God's name among the nations.

Our first and foremost concern should be to glorify God's name and make His salvation and His ways known among the peoples of the world. But we cannot do this on our own. Without God, we simply do not have the resources, ability and or even the will power to do this.

Therefore, as the Psalmist prayed, we also say:

“O God, we are Your servants and Your flock. O God, be gracious to us, bless us and sustain us so that the nations of the world may see Your greatness, Your power, Your love, Your mercy, Your kindness and Your salvation when they look at us. O God, through us and our lives, glorify Your Holy name and make Your

ways known to other people. O God, bless us, sustain us and use us as Your servants. Then the nations of the world shall praise You, O God. They shall see Your greatness. They shall come to You and praise You. All the nations of the world shall turn their eyes and hearts to You and praise You, O God. For You are worthy to be praised.”