



THE COMPANIONS

Stories of the Sahaba

Lives of the companions of the Prophet ﷺ, and
what they ask of our faith

Before you begin

These are not summaries. They are invitations to sit with the lives of the people who stood closest to the Prophet ﷺ, and to let them move something in our own hearts.

Each chapter is retold faithfully from Dr. Omar Suleiman's series *The Firsts* (Yaqeen Institute), with every Qur'anic verse taken from its canonical translation. Read one slowly.

THE DAILY WIRD · [THEDAILYWIRD.COM](https://thedailywird.com)

Salma and Ubaydullah ibn Abi Rafi

The Hands That Served the Prophet's House

There is a kind of greatness the histories almost forget to write down, because it never asks to be written down. It does not lead armies or deliver sermons. It carries water up a mountain. It pitches a tent in the dark. It holds a newborn child and washes a body for burial. It writes, in a careful hand, the words of better-known people so that they will outlive the one who wrote them. The household of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was held up, year after year, by hands like these. And two of the hands belonged to a woman named Salma and to her son, Ubaydullah ibn Abi Rafi.

To understand them, you have to look not at the front of the room, where the famous names stood, but at the quiet edges of the Prophet's life, where the real work of a family gets done.

A woman whose parents history did not record

We do not know the names of Salma's mother and father (may Allah be pleased with her). The records that so carefully preserve the lineages of the noble of Quraysh fall silent here, and that silence is its own lesson. She entered the story of Islam from below, as an enslaved woman in the broad household of the Prophet's own family. Her mistress was Safiyyah bint Abd al-Muttalib (may Allah be pleased with her), the aunt of the Prophet

ﷺ and the mother of one of his most famous companions, az-Zubayr ibn al-Awwam (may Allah be pleased with him).

So Salma began her life owned by another, attached to a house she had not chosen, with no recorded father and no inherited rank to lift her. By every measure the world of Makkah used to weigh a person, she was at the bottom of it. And Allah would raise her, in the span of one lifetime, into the very center of the most consequential family that has ever lived.

Her husband was Abu Rafi (may Allah be pleased with him), who had himself been enslaved before he was freed. He had been the slave of al-Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib (may Allah be pleased with him), the uncle of the Prophet ﷺ, until the Prophet ﷺ set him free. Picture this couple clearly before going further: two people who started at the margins, in bondage, in the households of the aunt and uncle of the Prophet ﷺ, and who would end so deeply woven into the prophetic legacy that, today, scholars across the world still trace chains of knowledge back through their family. They moved from being looked down upon to being indispensable. That movement, from the edge to the heart, is the whole shape of their story.

The midwife of a sacred house

Salma's work was as intimate as work can be. In a time before hospitals, before clinics, before any of what we now take for granted, the children of a house came into the world through the hands of a midwife. Salma was that midwife for the household of the Prophet ﷺ. She was the one who went to that home, again and again, and delivered the children born into it.

Sit with what that means. The children the Prophet ﷺ had with our mother Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her), all of them,

were born into Salma's waiting hands, one after another. She was there for the births of that blessed house, present at the most private and most vulnerable hours a family knows. She was there, in particular, when Fatima (may Allah be pleased with her) was born, the daughter who would become the mother of the Prophet's grandsons and the leaf from which an entire lineage would unfold.

This is not a footnote. To be trusted, repeatedly, with the threshold between life and death in the home of the most honored man on earth is a station almost impossible to overstate. The Prophet ﷺ did not bring strangers into those hours. He brought Salma. Her competence and her trustworthiness were such that, year after year, hers were the first hands to touch his children.

The one who carried the news that changed Hamzah

Long before the deliveries in that house, Salma carried a different kind of weight, and it altered the course of early Islam.

Her mistress Safiyyah was extremely close to her brother Hamzah ibn Abd al-Muttalib (may Allah be pleased with him), the lion of a man who, in those first years, had no interest in religion at all. Hamzah loved the hunt. Every time he returned to Makkah from one of his expeditions, the people would crowd around him to hear of where he had been and what he had done. Faith was not on his mind.

Then one day Abu Jahl found the Prophet ﷺ near the Kaaba and humiliated and hurt him in public. Word of it reached Safiyyah, and it was Salma whom she sent. It was Salma who went to Hamzah and told him plainly what had happened to his nephew:

did you hear what Abu Jahl did to the one you are related to? She delivered the news, and the news did its work.

Hamzah marched straight to the Kaaba, walked up to Abu Jahl, struck him, and declared that he was now upon the religion of his nephew. He did not yet understand Islam. He told the Prophet ﷺ afterward that he did not even know whether he had truly embraced the faith or had simply been swept up in a moment of fury, that he felt the presence of God but did not know what to do next. The Prophet ﷺ told him to ask Allah to guide him to what was right, and faith settled into Hamzah's heart. He would die a martyr, named by the Prophet ﷺ as a master of the martyrs.

And the spark of it, the message that lit the whole sequence, was carried by an enslaved woman walking across Makkah with news for a hunter. Allah uses whom He wills. The instrument He chose was Salma.

Freed, and present for everything

Salma was freed by the Prophet ﷺ early on, and after that her life became inseparable from his journey. She accompanied the Muslims to Madinah. She was present, by the accounts, through battle after battle, one of the steady, working presences around the Prophet ﷺ wherever he went. Her husband Abu Rafi was cut from the same cloth, the man who pitched the tent, who delivered messages, who collected and distributed debts and charity on behalf of the Prophet ﷺ. A messenger of the Messenger, married to the midwife of his house. Between them they covered the unglamorous, essential ground that a community standing up under persecution and war could not do without.

In Madinah, the births continued, and so did Salma's hands. When the son of the Prophet ﷺ, Ibrahim, was born to Maria, it

was Salma who delivered him, and it was Salma who carried the good news to the Prophet ﷺ that he had a son. She delivered the grandsons, Hasan and Husayn (may Allah be pleased with them), as well. The same midwife who had received the Prophet's children from Khadijah now received his grandchildren. One woman's hands span generations of that family, holding each new life as it arrived.

Then Allah gave her one more role, and it closes the circle in a way that stops the breath. When Fatima (may Allah be pleased with her) was dying, Salma was the one who nursed her in her final illness. And when Fatima passed, Salma was among those who washed her body for burial. Think of it: Salma had brought Fatima into the world, the first hands to ever hold her, and Salma was there to wash her and prepare her for her grave, among the last hands to ever tend her. To be entrusted with both the beginning and the end of so beloved a life is a closeness almost without parallel. From a special vantage at the very center of the household, Salma witnessed it all, and from that vantage she narrated to us what she saw. Her recorded narrations are few, only a couple, but they come from a place no one else stood.

We do not know where she died, or when. The histories that lost her parents' names also lost the date of her passing. But it does not matter. Her time was contained, from beginning to end, in the most blessed years and the most blessed company that this world has ever held.

The son who wrote it down

Allah blessed Salma and Abu Rafi with several children: Ubaydullah, Ali, and others. But one of their sons became a scholar whose name still travels through the chains of our

tradition: Ubaydullah ibn Abi Rafi (may Allah be pleased with him).

The legacy of his parents did not fade in him; it changed shape. His father had carried messages for the Prophet ﷺ. Ubaydullah attached himself, just as his father had, to the family of the Prophet ﷺ, to Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him), and he became Ali's scribe. The boy born to a freed midwife and a freed messenger grew into the man who held the pen for the fourth caliph of Islam. Ali then appointed him to distribute and collect the zakat and the sadaqa, the very work of charity that his father had done before him. The same trust, the same service, passed down a generation, refined into something even more lasting.

For Ubaydullah was gifted with the ability to write and to gather, and he gave that gift to knowledge. He narrated many hadith from Ali, and many more from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him), until he became one of the frequent and reliable narrators of our tradition. Ibn Hajar described him as trustworthy, very strong in hadith, and prolific in narration. The son of an enslaved woman had become an authority whom the scholars cite by name.

And then Allah raised him further still. Ubaydullah became the teacher of some of the most consequential figures in the household of the Prophet ﷺ: Ali ibn al-Husayn, known as Zayn al-Abidin; Muhammad al-Baqir; Ja'far al-Sadiq. The descendants of the Prophet ﷺ, the very people whose births his mother had attended, took Ubaydullah as their teacher and narrated from him. Through that single link, more than a hundred narrations from the family of the Prophet ﷺ pass through the hands of this man whose grandparents were enslaved. Ubaydullah, in turn,

bore children of his own who became scholars and who carried the tradition forward after him.

So when a student today opens a book and reads a chain of narration that runs back through the family of the Prophet ﷺ, there is, woven quietly into the isnad, the name of a family of freed slaves. The scholar knows it; most readers never will. It is one of the most beautiful hidden facts in the whole architecture of our knowledge: that the words were kept safe, in part, by the descendants of people the world had once owned.

What this family's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read about the famous companions and feel that their greatness is far away, reserved for people born noble or chosen for the front of the room. The life of Salma, of Abu Rafi, and of Ubaydullah closes that distance. They had no lineage the Arabs valued. They began in bondage. And Allah lifted them, by their service and their sincerity, into the heart of the most honored family that has ever lived, and from there into the permanent record of His religion. Their story is not a monument to admire from below. It is a door, and it is standing open.

The first thing their lives ask of you is to honor the work no one sees. Salma was not a preacher or a general. She was a midwife. Her greatness was in showing up, faithfully, at the hardest and most private hours, and doing her work well for the sake of the family she served. Most of the good that holds a community together is exactly this kind of good: quiet, repeated, unthanked. Ask yourself what your own version of carrying water up the mountain is, the small faithful task in your home or your community that no one will applaud, and then do it the way she did, as worship, because Allah sees it even when no one else does.

The second thing is sincerity, ikhlas. This family was content to be the hands and not the face. Abu Rafi pitched the tent and delivered the message; Ubaydullah held the pen while another's words were preserved; Salma worked at the threshold of life and never once, in all the histories, asked to be made famous for it. Their reward was with Allah, and it was enough for them. There is a freedom in that which most of us have never tasted, because we keep tallying what we do and waiting for someone to notice. Do one good thing today that no human being will ever connect to your name. Let it be between you and your Lord. That is the rarest and purest kind of deed, and it is the kind this family lived on.

The third thing is trust in what Allah can do with a humble beginning. Nothing about Salma's start in life suggested that she would one day hold the children and grandchildren of the Prophet ﷺ, or that her son would teach the masters of the next generation, or that her family's name would be carried in the chains of a hundred narrations centuries after her death. She could not have planned any of it. She simply served, with whatever she had, exactly where Allah had placed her, and He raised her in ways she could never have imagined. This is the promise that should steady you: you are not asked to engineer your own greatness. You are asked to be faithful in the place and the role Allah has given you, however small it looks, and to leave the lifting to Him. The Qur'an reminds us again and again that He is the One who raises some people in rank over others, and that what is with Him is better and more lasting than anything the world hands out. He is not constrained by where you started. He is moved by how sincerely you serve.

So take one thing from this family into your ordinary life. Find the unseen work in front of you and do it well, for Allah. Give one

deed today that no one will know about. And trust that the One who took an enslaved woman with no recorded name and set her at the center of His Prophet's house can do far more with your small, sincere offering than you will ever see in this life. May Allah be pleased with Salma, with Abu Rafi, and with Ubaydullah, and may He grant us their sincerity, their humility, and a share in the quiet service that He never forgets.

This chapter follows the account of Salma, Abu Rafi, and Ubaydullah ibn Abi Rafi (may Allah be pleased with them) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). No Qur'an verse is quoted directly, as the source narrative cites none; references to the Qur'an's themes are given in prose. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abu Rafi al-Qibti

The Man Inside the Prophet's Home

Most of the great Companions are remembered for a single towering moment: a battle, a conquest, a stand taken when the rest of the world turned away. Abu Rafi (may Allah be pleased with him) is remembered for something quieter and, in its own way, harder. He is remembered for being trusted. He was the man who built the furniture in the Prophet's ﷺ house, who carried the Prophet's ﷺ private messages, who pitched his tent on the journey, who cooked his food during the siege, who whispered the call to prayer into the ear of the Prophet's ﷺ newborn grandson al-Hasan. He lived inside the household of the most important man who ever walked the earth, and he was never once a problem there. When the Companions were asked one day to name the purest heart among them, his was a name that came to their lips.

His is the story of a slave who became family, and of a man so free of malice that the people closest to the Prophet ﷺ could think of no better example of a clean heart.

A man whose beginning was lost

We do not know how he came to the Hijaz. We cannot trace the battle or the market or the road that carried him there. We know only that he was Coptic, originally from Egypt, and that at some point he came into the possession of al-Abbas ibn Abd al-

Muttalib (may Allah be pleased with him), the uncle of the Prophet ﷺ. Even his name is uncertain. Some said he was Ibrahim, some said Yasar, but most of the scholars say his name was Aslam. History remembers him by none of these. It remembers him by his kunya, the name a man is called by his children: Abu Rafi.

There is something fitting in this. The world had stripped away his homeland, his lineage, and even the certainty of his own name. What it could not take from him was his character, and that is the only thing the books ended up needing to record. He arrives in the story not as a figure of importance but as a household servant in Makkah, watching, carrying messages between al-Abbas and his brothers and his nephew, the Prophet ﷺ. He was, as one might put it, on the edge of the most important events in human history before he had any idea what they were.

The moment Islam was placed in his heart

His own account of how he became Muslim is brief and unforgettable. Quraysh dispatched him to the Prophet ﷺ during some phase of negotiation, most likely after the Hijra, when the Prophet ﷺ was already in Madinah. He went carrying their message. And then he says simply: "I saw the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and Islam was cast into my heart." Not argued into it. Not reasoned into it. Cast into it, the moment his eyes fell on the Prophet ﷺ.

He turned to the Prophet ﷺ and said, "O Messenger of Allah, by Allah, I will never go back to them." He did not want to return to Quraysh. He had seen the truth and he wanted to stay near it. But the Prophet's ﷺ answer is one of the great lessons of his character. He said, in effect, that he did not betray covenants and

did not imprison messengers. To keep Abu Rafi would be to break the trust under which he had come, or to detain an envoy, and the Prophet ﷺ would do neither. So he told him to return, to keep his Islam in his heart, and to come back when the time was right.

Imagine what that asked of Abu Rafi. He had to carry a secret back into the very heart of the city that hated this religion, with no protection at all. The Prophet ﷺ had left for Madinah. There was no clan to shelter a Coptic servant if it became known that he believed. So he went back into Makkah and quietly held his faith, alongside Umm al-Fadl Lubaba, the wife of al-Abbas, and the household around her, all of them secretly Muslim in a hostile city, all of them waiting.

Badr, and the fists of Abu Lahab

Then came the day of Badr, and one of the most vivid scenes in all the seerah unfolds with Abu Rafi at its center.

He was sitting with Umm al-Fadl when the news began to filter back into Makkah. Abu Lahab, the Prophet's ﷺ own uncle and one of his bitterest enemies, had not gone out to fight; he had sent a man in his place, and now he paced the house waiting to hear what had happened. He was a heavy man, and Abu Rafi describes how he would sit down and lean his back against Abu Rafi's back to rest. Picture it precisely: a secret believer, forbidden to show his heart, serving as a literal resting place for the one man the Qur'an would name for his hostility to the Prophet ﷺ. Inside, Abu Rafi and Umm al-Fadl were aching to hear of the Muslims' victory and forbidden to show it. Across from them, Abu Lahab was sick with dread, waiting to hear of their defeat.

Then Abu Sufyan arrived, and Abu Lahab rushed to him: "Come, tell me what happened." And Abu Sufyan described it, almost in disbelief. They had met a people small in number but not in courage. The Muslims had killed them as they wished and captured them as they wished. And there were riders, he said, on great horses, beings that filled the sky, striking the Quraysh down while the Quraysh could not strike back.

Abu Rafi could not contain himself. "I raised my hand and I raised my voice," he said, "and I said: By Allah, those were the angels. By Allah, those were the angels." It was a slip, and it cost him. Abu Lahab fell on him, sat on his chest, and began to beat him, fist after fist, until he had nearly cracked his skull and Abu Rafi was close to bleeding out. It was Umm al-Fadl who saved him. She seized a tent pole and struck Abu Lahab across the head, and she said to him: are you taking advantage of him because you think his master is not here to protect him?

That blow was the end of Abu Lahab. The wound festered. He rotted from it, and Abu Rafi is the one who narrates how it ended: his own people would not wash his body because of the stench of it, and his own sons buried him by throwing water at him from a distance and dropping stones on him from above, because no one would come near. This was the man whose ruin Allah had already declared:

May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he be ruined too! Neither his wealth nor his gains will help him: he will burn in the Flaming Fire

QUR'AN 111:1-3

Abu Rafi watched the prophecy come true with his own eyes, and he had felt that man's fists on his own face for the sake of the

truth.

Freed, married, and folded into the family

When the way was finally clear, Abu Rafi made his way to Madinah as a migrant, a Muhajir. Al-Abbas had gifted him to the Prophet ﷺ, so that he now belonged to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. And the Prophet ﷺ freed him.

Then the Prophet ﷺ did something that tells you how he saw human beings. He married Abu Rafi to a freedwoman named Salma (may Allah be pleased with her), and he cared for them both. The same Prophet ﷺ who arranged marriages among the most honored of his Companions arranged this one, joining two freed slaves to one another with the same care, treating their household as worthy of his attention. In the world Abu Rafi had come from, a man like him was property, a thing that could be beaten when his master was away. In the household of the Prophet ﷺ, he was a man with a name, a wife, a freedom, and a place.

Abu Rafi went on to witness Uhud, the Trench, and the rest of the campaigns alongside the Prophet ﷺ. He and Salma were with him at Khaybar, and it is Abu Rafi who narrates the famous account of Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) lifting a great door by himself and fighting from behind it that day. But it was not on the battlefield that Abu Rafi's life found its real shape. It was inside the home.

The trust of the household

The Prophet ﷺ saw that this man could be trusted, and he drew him close. Abu Rafi had been a carpenter in Makkah, and so he became the one who built the simple furniture of the Prophet's

ﷺ house, the small mattress that folded into a seat for the day, the modest things a humble home needed. He worked with his hands inside the most blessed household on earth.

The trust went further. When the Prophet ﷺ appointed a man from Banu Makhzum to collect the zakat, the man invited Abu Rafi along and told him he would receive a share of the charity for his help. Abu Rafi would not take a single step until he had asked the Prophet ﷺ whether it was permissible for him. And the Prophet's ﷺ answer became one of the great honors of his life. He told him that the freed servant of a people is counted as one of them, and that the family of the Prophet ﷺ are not permitted to take from charity. In other words: you cannot take this, Abu Rafi, because you are one of us now. Just as Fatima could not take from the zakat, just as al-Hasan and al-Husayn could not, neither could he, because he had been folded into the household of prophecy itself. Abu Rafi treasured that hadith. It was not a restriction to him. It was a coronation.

He was present, too, for the miracles. During the siege of the Trench, when hunger pressed hard on everyone, a single sheep was gifted to the Prophet ﷺ, and Abu Rafi put it in a pot to cook. The Prophet ﷺ asked him what it was, then said: bring me a foreleg when it is done. Abu Rafi brought it. The Prophet ﷺ said: bring me another foreleg. He brought it. The Prophet ﷺ said: bring me another. Abu Rafi, puzzled, finally said what any honest man would say: O Messenger of Allah, how many forelegs does a single sheep have? And the Prophet ﷺ told him: by the One in whose hand is my soul, had you not said that, the forelegs would have kept coming as many times as I asked for them. Abu Rafi stood inside that small wonder, a little food made much, and he carried the memory of it for the rest of his life.

He learned the Prophet's ﷺ character in the ordinary business of the household. The Prophet ﷺ would borrow and lend within the community, including with his Jewish neighbors in Madinah, not out of need alone but to build harmony, to knit the society together through the small obligations people owe one another. Once the Prophet ﷺ borrowed a young camel and sent Abu Rafi to repay the man. Abu Rafi came back and said he could find only a better, fuller-grown camel than the one that had been borrowed. The Prophet ﷺ told him: give it to him, for the best of people are those who repay their debts in the best way. Abu Rafi learned, in that moment, that generosity is not arithmetic, that you do not weigh out exactly what is owed and nothing more, that excellence means leaving the other person better than the strict account requires.

He carried the Prophet's ﷺ messages when he wished to marry Maymuna bint al-Harith (may Allah be pleased with her), going between them as the trusted go-between. He pitched the Prophet's ﷺ tent on the Farewell Pilgrimage. He narrated how the Prophet ﷺ dealt with insects and scorpions, how he prayed, what he recited quietly in prayer. And when al-Hasan was born, it was Abu Rafi who made the call to prayer softly into the newborn's ear. Some forty narrations from the Prophet ﷺ are preserved through him in the great collections, nearly all of them glimpses of the intimate life of the household that the rest of us would never otherwise have seen.

The purest heart among them

But the testimony that says the most about Abu Rafi did not come from a battlefield or a famous deed. It came from the Companions themselves.

One day they asked the Prophet ﷺ who the best of people were. He answered: the one with a pure heart and a truthful tongue. They said, we understand a truthful tongue, but who is the one with a pure heart? And the Prophet ﷺ explained: he is the God-conscious, clean heart, in which there is no sin, no transgression, no malice, and no envy. A heart, in other words, that is pure toward Allah and pure toward people at the same time. It is worth pausing here, because we throw the phrase "good heart" around easily, often as an excuse for someone's bad behavior. The Prophet ﷺ meant something far more exacting: a heart with no rancor in it at all.

Then the Companions did something extraordinary. They looked among themselves for someone who matched that description, a man so clean of heart that he carried no hatred, no grudge, nothing but purity, and one of the names they reached for was Abu Rafi. Here was a man who seemed so simple, so easy to overlook. He did not quarrel with anyone. He was never seen angry. Whenever you looked at him he was smiling, always in some small service to the Prophet ﷺ, never carrying a single grudge against a single soul. For the Companions to name him as the picture of a pure heart is one of the most beautiful tributes in all of their history.

His virtue did not fade when the Prophet ﷺ passed away. Abu Rafi went on to fight in the conquests under Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and into the time of Ali (may Allah be pleased with them all), among those who took part in the opening of Jerusalem. And through all of it he remained what he had become: part of the family of the family of the Prophet ﷺ. He stayed close to the household of Ali, so close that he is even recorded gently correcting al-Hasan in his prayer, the same grandchild into whose ear he had once made the adhan. The slave whose origins

were lost had become a fixture of the Prophet's ﷺ house, and he never left it.

What Abu Rafi's life asks of our faith

It is easy to admire the men who changed history in a single dramatic stroke and to assume their lives have nothing to do with ours. Abu Rafi will not let us off so easily, because his greatness was not made of dramatic strokes. It was made of the way he carried his heart through ordinary days, and ordinary days are exactly what we have.

Begin with how he believed. Islam was cast into his heart the moment he saw the Prophet ﷺ, and then he had to carry that belief alone, in secret, in a city that would have destroyed him for it, with no clan and no protection. He did not wait for safety to declare itself before he committed inwardly. He trusted what he had seen and held it through danger. Most of us guard our hearts until the cost of faith feels manageable, until belief is easy and approved. Abu Rafi believed when it could have cost him his life, and the lesson for us is plainer than his circumstances: that what Allah asks of the heart, He asks before the conditions are comfortable, and trusting Him in the dark is the very thing faith is made of.

Then look at what the Companions actually praised in him. Not his courage, though he was brave. Not his closeness to the Prophet ﷺ, though few were closer. They praised the cleanness of his heart, that he carried no malice and no envy toward anyone. This is a quality available to every single one of us, and it is one of the hardest to keep. We accumulate grudges the way a house accumulates dust. We keep small accounts against people who wronged us. We let envy work quietly in us when others are given what we wanted. Abu Rafi shows that a heart can be kept

clean, that a person can move through a whole life, through slavery and war and the deaths of those he loved, without letting bitterness take root. Ask yourself tonight who you are still holding something against, and whether you could do for the sake of Allah what Abu Rafi did: simply let it go, and meet people with a heart that wishes them well.

Consider, too, what he did with the trust he was given. He never grasped at more than was his. When charity was offered to him, he stopped to ask whether it was lawful before he would touch it. When he repaid a debt for the Prophet ﷺ, he learned to give better than was owed. This is ikhlas and scrupulousness woven into the smallest transactions of a life, the refusal to take what is not rightfully yours even when no one would notice, the instinct to give a little more than justice demands. You can practice this today, in how you handle money that is not yours, in how you repay what you owe, in how carefully you guard yourself from a gain that is not clean. These are not small things to Allah. They were the daily fabric of a life He loved.

And here is what should lift the heart. Abu Rafi began with nothing the world values. No homeland, no lineage, not even a settled name. He was property, a man who could be beaten when his master stepped out. And Allah took that man and seated him inside the household of His Messenger ﷺ, made him family to the family of the Prophet ﷺ, recorded his words in the books that the whole ummah would read, and let the closest Companions name him as the example of a pure heart. The world had nothing for him. His Lord had everything. This is the promise underneath his quiet life: that Allah does not measure you by where you began, by what was taken from you, or by how the world ranks you. He measures the heart. A clean heart, a truthful tongue, a

trust kept faithfully, these can raise a forgotten servant to a place that kings never reach.

So take one thing from Abu Rafi into your own ordinary days. Clear one grudge from your heart for the sake of Allah. Refuse one gain that is not truly yours. Serve someone quietly, the way he served, without needing it seen. That is how a man with no name became one of the most beloved figures in the house of prophecy, in private, in purity, in faithful service, and it is a path still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Abu Rafi, cleanse our hearts of the malice and envy that his was free of, and gather us with the people of pure hearts and truthful tongues.

This chapter follows the account of Abu Rafi al-Qibti (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (111:1-3). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abu Muwayhiba

Witness to the Final Night

There is a kind of greatness that the world keeps no record of. A man can pass through history almost unseen, with no lineage anyone bothered to write down, no battles named after him, no sayings memorized by a thousand students, and yet be standing, on one particular night, in the single most sacred place a human being could be: alone beside the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the darkness, hearing words that almost no one else on earth would ever hear. That man was Abu Muwayhiba (may Allah be pleased with him), and his whole life seems to have been quietly arranged for one night and one conversation.

He was a freed slave, a man without rank in the eyes of his society, and Allah gave him a place in the seerah that kings would have traded their kingdoms for.

A man known only by his kunya

Almost nothing about Abu Muwayhiba's early life is certain, and that uncertainty is itself part of his story. He came from the Mawali, the freed slaves, of the tribe of Muzaynah, a people who originated near the coast at Yanbu, a couple of hours from Madinah toward the sea. Like so many of those who were freed and then loved by the Prophet ﷺ, he was most likely taken captive in war at some point, and then set free by the Messenger

of Allah ﷺ himself. From the moment of his freedom, the histories go quiet. They do not even agree on his name.

He is remembered almost entirely by his kunya: Abu Muwayhiba, the freed slave of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. One book, a work dedicated specifically to people known only by their kunya, tries to give him a name, Muhabbir ibn Mu'adh, but no other source confirms it, and so even his name remains a question mark. Think about what that means. A man whose name we are not even sure of was chosen for a moment that the whole ummah would remember until the end of time. His obscurity is not a flaw in the record. It is the point. Allah does not need a person to be famous in order to honour them.

A seat in the household of revelation

What we do know is where he chose to be. Abu Muwayhiba settled among the people of al-Suffa, the poor companions who lived in the mosque of the Prophet ﷺ itself. They had no homes of their own, and the companions took care of them, but their poverty bought them something priceless. The Suffa was not merely a shelter. It was a kind of seminary inside the masjid, a circle of men who learned hadith, who learned knowledge, who absorbed the manners of the Prophet ﷺ and his companions by sheer nearness, day after day, inside the very place where revelation was being lived.

Picture the trade he had made. He owned nothing the world valued. He had no house, no wealth, no standing. And in exchange, he lived where the Prophet ﷺ walked every day, learning at the closest possible range what it meant to be a believer. There are people who would give everything they own for a single afternoon in that masjid, and Abu Muwayhiba lived there. He had understood something that the wealthy of every

age keep failing to understand: that proximity to guidance is worth more than property, and that the poorest seat in the house of the Prophet ﷺ is richer than the grandest house anywhere else.

The one expedition the histories place him in is the Battle of al-Muraysi, also called the campaign of Banu Mustaliq, in the fifth year after the migration. It is remembered for what came after it, the slander against our mother Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), when she was accidentally left behind by the caravan because they assumed she was inside her covered litter on the camel. And here, in a small detail that suddenly makes the scene vivid, we are told that Abu Muwayhiba was the man who used to lead Aisha's camel. So when you imagine that famous, painful episode, the camel moving off in the dark without her, you can now put a face to the man walking beside it. He was there, in the background of one of the most well-known stories of the seerah, doing humble work faithfully, unnoticed.

The Prophet's farewell to the fallen

To understand the night that made Abu Muwayhiba, you have to understand the days around it, because the Prophet ﷺ was already saying goodbye.

A companion named Uqbah ibn Amir (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that in those final days, the Prophet ﷺ went out for what would be his last journey beyond his immediate surroundings, beyond his house and his masjid. He went to Uhud. All through his life he had been in the habit of visiting the martyrs of Uhud, the beloved who had fallen there years before. Now, with death only days or a week or two away, he climbed out one last time to stand among them.

This was nearly a decade after those men had been buried. And the Prophet ﷺ prayed over them the way you pray over someone the day you lay them to rest. The scholars differ on exactly what that prayer was, whether it was supplication for them or a funeral prayer renewed, but the feeling that comes through is unmistakable. It was a farewell. It was the loyalty of a man returning to his fallen brothers one final time, standing over them as though grieving them freshly, refusing to let nearly ten years dull what he owed them. Hold that image the next time the martyrs of Uhud are mentioned: the Prophet ﷺ, in the last week of his life, walking out to the dead he had never forgotten.

And then he turned to the living and comforted them. He told them that he was going ahead of them, that he was a witness over them, and that, by Allah, he could see his Hawd, his fountain in the next life, even now. This was the same fountain he had promised them again and again, the place where he would be waiting for them, where the believer who held fast would find him at last. That was the comfort he kept giving as the end approached: be patient, hold on, and you will find me at the fountain.

Up to this point, the Prophet ﷺ was still walking on his own. He was still strong enough to make the climb to Uhud, still able to move freely. The illness had not yet revealed itself as the one that would take him. But it was about to deepen. And it is exactly here, on the edge of that final descent, that Abu Muwayhiba steps into the light.

The summons in the middle of the night

It was night, only a few days before the Prophet ﷺ would die, when the call came. Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-As preserved the account, narrating it from Abu Muwayhiba himself. The Prophet

ﷺ turned to him and said that he had been commanded to go and seek forgiveness for the people buried in al-Baqi, the cemetery of Madinah, and he told Abu Muwayhiba to come with him.

Of all the people he could have called, he called this one man. Not a famous companion. Not a scholar whose name fills the books. He called the freed slave, the man whose name we are not even sure of, and asked him to walk with him into the dark.

So Abu Muwayhiba rose, prepared himself, and went out. He says they set out together in the depth of the night. Try to sit with that scene for a moment, because the man who lived it never forgot it. No lamps. No crowd. No daylight. Just a believer and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, walking through the black quiet of Madinah toward the graves, and Abu Muwayhiba knowing, in some part of himself, that to be chosen for this was a gift beyond anything he could have earned. He was the last person on earth to be given a private walk at the side of the Prophet ﷺ outside his home.

When they reached al-Baqi, the Prophet ﷺ stood before the graves and greeted the dead. Peace be upon you, people of the graves. He spoke to them as though they could hear, as a man speaks to those he loves and is about to follow, and he sought forgiveness for them, and he was grateful, the narration suggests, that they had been spared the trials that were coming, the storms of confusion and division that would fall upon the living after he was gone.

The choice, and a man who begged him to stay

Then the Prophet ﷺ did something that turned this from a visit into one of the most piercing scenes in the entire seerah. He

turned away from the graves and faced Abu Muwayhiba directly, and began to speak to him.

First he had spoken to the dead. Now he spoke to this one living man in the middle of the night. And what he said was this. He told Abu Muwayhiba that he had been given a choice. He had been offered the keys of this world and a long life in it, to live on until the very end of the dunya with all of its kingdom in his hand, and then Paradise after that. Or he could choose to meet his Lord now, and go straight to the Garden.

Imagine being the one person Allah's Messenger ﷺ chose to share this with. Abu Muwayhiba understood at once what was being said, and his heart broke. He answered with the words a companion uses when he loves someone more than himself: may my mother and father be sacrificed for you, Messenger of Allah. Take the first one. Take the keys of this world, stay here, live long, and reach Paradise afterward. Choose us. Stay with us. Why should you hurry? Stay.

It was a plea, not a piece of advice. A man, alone with the Prophet ﷺ at the edge of losing him, doing the only thing his heart would let him do, asking him not to go.

And the Prophet ﷺ answered him gently and finally. No, Abu Muwayhiba. He had already chosen the meeting with his Lord. Then he turned back to the graves and asked forgiveness for them once more, and the two of them walked home together through the night.

Only a few days later, the illness reached its peak, and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ passed away.

That was Abu Muwayhiba's one great moment, and his one narration. After this, the histories lose him completely. We do not

know when he died, or where, or how. The man who walked the Prophet ﷺ to the graves at the very end simply slips back into the obscurity he came from, leaving behind this single, unrepeatable memory. And it is enough. It tells us how aware the Prophet ﷺ was of the trials that would outlast him. It tells us how tenderly he said goodbye. And it shows us, with no decoration at all, what it looks like when a soul is offered the whole world and answers without hesitation that it would rather have its Lord.

What Abu Muwayhiba's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel that it has nothing to do with us. He was a companion, present at a sacred moment we can only imagine. But his life is not a sealed relic. It is a quiet question pressed against our own iman, and the question has several parts.

The first part is about who Allah honours. The world keeps its records by fame, lineage, and wealth, and by that measure Abu Muwayhiba was nobody. He had no property worth listing, no name the historians could even agree on. And Allah placed him, alone, at the side of His Messenger ﷺ on one of the last nights of his life. This should reorder something inside you. The honour you are chasing in the eyes of people is not the honour that lasts. Allah is able to raise a forgotten freed slave above every chief and every notable, and He does it for reasons the world cannot see. So stop measuring your worth by who notices you. Do the humble, faithful thing in the background, lead the camel well when no one is watching, and leave the honouring to the One who honoured Abu Muwayhiba.

The second part is about what we trade our lives for. He gave up everything the world owns and bought a seat in the masjid of the Prophet ﷺ, among the poor of al-Suffa, learning faith at close

range. Most of us spend our lives doing the opposite trade, pouring ourselves into property and comfort and standing, and squeezing nearness to Allah into the margins. His life asks plainly: what are you buying with your days? Nearness to guidance, or things you will leave behind? You can begin to correct the trade today, by giving the best hour to the Qur'an and the prayer rather than the leftover one, by choosing the gatherings that bring you closer to Allah over the ones that only entertain you.

The third part is the heart of it, and it belongs to the Prophet ﷺ himself, though Abu Muwayhiba is the one who carried it to us. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ was offered the entire world, all of it, with a long life and a kingdom and immortality until the end of time, and Paradise still waiting at the end. And he chose to meet his Lord now instead. He did not weigh it. He did not hesitate. The dunya, even the whole of it offered at once, was not worth a single delay in meeting Allah. That is the scale a believing heart is meant to carry, and it is the exact opposite of the scale the world trains into us, where a little more of this life always feels worth almost any price. Ask yourself honestly how much of Allah's pleasure you quietly postpone for a small piece of this world: a prayer delayed for a meeting, an obligation softened for a profit, the truth left unspoken to keep a comfort. The Prophet ﷺ was offered everything and chose his Lord. We are usually offered very little, and still choose the dunya. His choice is a mirror, and it is meant to make us flinch, and then change.

And there is a tenderness here that should feed your love and your hope. Notice that the Prophet ﷺ, in his last days, kept turning toward those he was leaving, the martyrs of Uhud, the dead of al-Baqi, the living companions he promised to meet at the fountain. He was a witness over his ummah, going ahead of

us, waiting. Whatever trials he saw coming, and he saw them clearly, the promise he left was a place of reunion, water in the next life for those who held on. That promise is still open. Holding on means refusing to be the one who is diluted by a little of this dunya, the one who sells nearness to Allah cheaply when the test comes.

So take one concrete thing from this nameless, honoured man into your ordinary life. The quality to imitate is this: to keep the meeting with Allah larger in your heart than anything the world can offer you, and to act like it when the small choices come. Today, choose Allah in one place where you would normally choose the dunya. Pray the prayer on time when it is inconvenient. Give something away that you would rather keep. Hold your tongue, or speak the truth, for His sake and not for theirs. Do it quietly, the way Abu Muwayhiba did everything, without an audience. That is how a freed slave with a half-remembered name ended up walking beside the Prophet ﷺ on his final night, and that road is still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Abu Muwayhiba, may He keep us from being among those seduced by a little of this world, and may He gather us with the man who was offered everything and chose his Lord, at the fountain where the Prophet ﷺ is waiting.

This chapter follows the account of Abu Muwayhiba (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). No verse of the Qur'an is quoted, as the lecture cites none directly; the hadith of Abu Muwayhiba, the farewell at Uhud, and the visit to al-Baqi are recounted as related in the lecture. Where the histories carry

more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Thawban ibn Bujaddad

The One Who Could Not Bear to Be Apart

There is a man in the books of hadith who left no children, founded no clan, and carried no famous father's name, and yet whose name appears in over a hundred and twenty narrations on the lips of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. When you study the signs of the end of times, his name is everywhere. When you learn how to fast six days of Shawwal, or how to correct your salah after forgetfulness, or which words to say when you rise from sujud, his name is behind it. He came into the story of Islam as a prisoner of war, a captive with no rank and no future. He left it as a teacher whose students became the great scholars of the next generation.

His name was Thawban, and the most beautiful thing about him is not the knowledge he carried. It is the reason he carried it. He simply could not bear to be away from the Prophet ﷺ, not for a day, and in the end not even for the length of this world.

A captive who was offered his freedom

Thawban (may Allah be pleased with him) was from Yemen. His full name was Thawban ibn Bujaddad, though in the books of hadith he is only ever Thawban, because there is only one. He came into the prophetic circle in a way that tells you something about the world the Prophet ﷺ was building. He was a prisoner of war, an aseer, taken in one of the small expeditions of the

Madinan years. We do not know which battle. He was no commander, no enemy of the faith with blood on his hands. He was simply a man who had ended up on the wrong side of a fight and now stood, captured, in the line of sight of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

And the Prophet ﷺ looked at him. This was the prophetic basira, the vision that saw something in a person before that person had said a word. He walked up to this captive and gave him a choice that no prisoner expects to hear. If you would like to return to your people, he said, you are free to go. No ransom. No bondage. No condition. You may simply walk back to Yemen and to your old life.

But then he offered him something else. If you would like to stay, he said, you are with us, among the people of my household.

Imagine the turn of that moment in a single breath. One instant a man is property, the next he is told he may belong to the family of the Prophet ﷺ himself. Thawban looked at the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and his eyes told him he was looking at something he had never seen before, and the Prophet ﷺ saw the sincerity rise up in him. Thawban did not hesitate. I will stay, he said. I will be of the Prophet's family.

He was freed, and yet he chose to remain. He became what the books call mawla Rasulillah ﷺ, the freed slave of the Messenger of Allah, attached now not by chains but by love. And here is the quiet revolution buried in that scene: a freed slave in this new community was not merely someone to be fed and clothed kindly. He could become a scholar, a leader, a man whose name would outlast the names of the noble. It began with the Prophet ﷺ himself, in the way he looked at a captive from Yemen and saw a member of his own house.

Not a servant in the corner, but a student at the center

Thawban did not stay to do chores. He stayed to learn. He sat with the Prophet ﷺ, he asked him questions, he listened in on his teaching, and he served the household of the Prophet ﷺ with the closeness of family. He poured the water for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and for his companions. He traveled at his side. He watched, and he remembered, and what he remembered he later gave to the world.

So the narrations of Thawban are a window onto the prophetic household from the inside. He saw the generosity of the Prophet ﷺ toward his family, and he saw something stranger and harder alongside it: a refusal, at the height of power, to let that family grow soft on the comforts of this world.

There is a tender story he carried. The Prophet ﷺ would make his daughter Fatimah the last person he bid farewell to when he traveled and the first he greeted when he returned. Once, knowing he was coming home, Fatimah hung a beautiful curtain on her door and put silver bracelets on her two boys to welcome him. But on that return, the Prophet ﷺ did not come to her house. There could have been a hundred reasons. He was tired, or he had something to attend to in his own home. But Fatimah, in the closeness of a daughter to such a father, wondered if she had done something wrong. So she took the curtain down and pulled the bracelets off al-Hasan and al-Husayn and sent them to her father's house, saying, in effect, if these things kept you from me, they are gone.

The Prophet ﷺ took the bracelets, handed them to Thawban, and told him to give them away to a certain family. Then he explained, and the words are a parable that still cuts. These are my family, he said, and I would hate that they consume all of their

good things in this worldly life. He did not want their share of goodness spent here, leaving nothing for the Day of Judgment. Yet he did not want to wound their hearts either. So he told Thawban to buy Fatimah a simpler necklace, and for the two boys two bracelets of bone instead of silver, something plainer, so that they would still be happy but would carry a certain roughness with their father. This is one of the proofs of his prophethood: as his power grew, his standard of living did not rise to meet it. It grew harsher, because his eyes were fixed on the Garden, and he wanted his family's eyes fixed there too.

Thawban absorbed that lesson into his own bones. He had heard the Prophet ﷺ say that whoever guarantees him that they will never beg from people, he will guarantee them Paradise. So Thawban took a pledge that he would never ask anyone for anything. And he kept it in the smallest things. They said that if Thawban was riding his camel and his whip fell from his hand, he would not ask a soul to pass it up to him. He would climb down himself and pick it up, holding fast to the word of the Prophet ﷺ in a moment no one was watching.

The narrations he was trusted to carry

Much of what the ummah knows of its own practice came through this man. The hadith of fasting six days in Shawwal is his. The words *Allahumma anta as-salam* that we say after the prayer are his. The two prostrations of forgetfulness in salah come through him. Rulings on divorce, beloved du'as, pieces of guidance threaded through every Muslim's day, all carried by a freed slave from Yemen who sat close and listened well.

Once, a man met him in the mosque of Damascus and asked him for a deed that would bring him into Paradise. Thawban fell silent for a long time. Then he turned and said: I charge you with much

prostration to Allah, for there is no servant who makes a single sujud to Allah except that Allah raises him by it one degree and erases from him by it one sin. He had heard it from the Prophet ﷺ, and he gave it as the answer to the whole question of how to be saved.

He carried, too, the verse the companions once asked about on a journey, when revelation came down concerning those who hoard gold and silver. If we knew which kind of wealth is best, they said, we would keep that instead. And the Prophet ﷺ answered that the best wealth a person can store is a tongue that remembers Allah, a grateful heart, and a believing spouse who helps a person in their faith. Everything else, in the end, is not the wealth worth piling up.

But the narrations Thawban is most known for are the hardest ones. He was the companion entrusted with the warnings, the prophecies of how difficult things would become at the end of time. He narrated that once the sword falls upon this ummah it will not be lifted from it until the Day of Judgment. He narrated the famous warning that the nations would one day gather to feast upon the Muslims like diners around a platter, not because the Muslims were few, for they would be many, but because Allah would cast into their hearts *al-wahn*: love of this world and hatred of death.

And he carried the most sobering image of all. The Prophet ﷺ said that he knew a people of his nation who would come on the Day of Judgment with good deeds like the mountains of Tihamah, and Allah would make those mountains scattered dust. Thawban asked: describe them to us, Messenger of Allah, so that we are not among them without knowing. The Prophet ﷺ answered that they are your brothers, from your own people, who

pray in the night as you pray, but who, when they are alone with the sacred limits of Allah, violate them. A whole mountain of worship, undone by what a person does when they think no one sees. It is a diagnosis written for an age like ours, where it has never been easier to be alone with the very things Allah has forbidden.

A love that could not wait

Now we come to the thing that defines him. It was said of Thawban that he loved the Prophet ﷺ severely, and that he was *qalil as-sabr* away from him, almost without patience when they were apart. He would grow restless waiting for the Prophet ﷺ to come out each day. He wanted to be near him constantly. Does that sound like a man who entered this society as a captive and a slave? Waiting at the door each morning, agitated until the moment he could see his teacher's face.

One day the Prophet ﷺ came out and saw that Thawban's color had changed. He looked pale, drawn, plainly grieving over something. The Prophet ﷺ asked him what had changed his color. Are you sick? What happened?

Thawban said: Messenger of Allah, I am not in pain, and nothing has hurt me. It is only that when I do not see you for a while, I begin to miss you, and a terrible anxiety comes over me until I can see you again. And then, he said, I remembered the Hereafter, and I grew afraid. I thought, if I reach Paradise, you will be raised to the highest place with the prophets, and even if I am admitted, I will be in some lower part of it, and I will barely see you. And if I do not reach Paradise at all, then I will never see you again. What is Paradise, he was saying, without you in it?

Think about how pure that love was. Not love of station, not love of reward, but love of a person so deep that even the Garden felt empty without his face in it. And in answer to that man's grief, Allah sent down a verse of the Qur'an. Whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger, it promised, will be gathered with the ones Allah has favored. Thawban was the reason for its revelation:

Whoever obeys God and the Messenger will be among those He has blessed: the messengers, the truthful, those who bear witness to the truth, and the righteous- what excellent companions these are!

QUR'AN 4:69

It was Allah comforting Thawban, and through him every soul that has ever loved the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and feared the separation. You will be with him. Even after he dies, you will be gathered with the one you love.

A grief that drove him to the edge of the world

So when the Prophet ﷺ actually died, what do you imagine became of a man who could not bear to miss him for a single morning?

He could not stay in Madinah. Everywhere he turned, the streets and the mosque and the doorways all remembered the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and Thawban could not endure it. He lingered only a few days after the burial, and then he left. He went to Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) with a single request: keep me perpetually in the expeditions. Send me out to battle and leave me there. I cannot remain in this place now that the Prophet ﷺ is gone from it.

So he carried his grief into the campaigns of Sham. He is first documented in Damascus, where he settled for a time and gathered around him a circle of students from the next generation: Shaddad ibn Aws, Jubayr ibn Nufayr, Abu Idris al-Khawlani, Abu Salamah ibn Abd ar-Rahman, Khalid ibn Ma'dan, names that would become the scholars of the tabi'in. Unlike a companion who narrated a few hadiths and passed on, Thawban became a teacher of the highest caliber. Then he lived in Ramlah in Palestine, where the narrations of the Hour were known and taught. He took part in the conquest of Egypt under the army of Amr ibn al-As and kept a home and students there too. And finally he came to Homs in Sham, where he would spend the rest of his days. A man with no descendants scattered the knowledge of the Prophet ﷺ across the whole of the new Muslim world, because he could not stop moving, and he could not stop teaching what he had loved.

There is a narration he carried that fit his own life like a glove. Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, generations later, once apologized to one who narrated to him for the trouble of a hard, hurried journey, and the man answered, in effect, it is nothing, but let me give you a hadith as a gift for it. It was Thawban's narration about the Hawd, the fountain of the Prophet ﷺ on the Day of Judgment, wider than the distance from Aden to Jerusalem, whiter than milk and sweeter than honey, its cups as many as the stars. And the first people brought to drink from it, the Prophet ﷺ said, will be the poor among the emigrants with their dusty clothes and disheveled hair, the ones for whom no fine doors are opened and to whom no one bothers to reply. The marginalized, the turned-away. Turned away from people's doors, but never from the Prophet ﷺ. Thawban, the freed slave with no noble name, was the one entrusted to carry the news that the rejected of this

world would be the closest to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in the next. When Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz heard it, he wept, for Allah had opened the doors of this world to him, and he swore to keep himself from its riches lest they cost him that place.

The dignity of a freed slave at the end

When Thawban fell ill in Homs, the governor of the city, Abdullah ibn Qurt, did not come to visit him. It was strange, given how known and honored Thawban was among the students of knowledge. One of the people came to him instead, and the dying man asked, do you know how to write? Yes, the man said. Then write, said Thawban. Address it to the governor: From Thawban, the freed slave of the Prophet, and then say to him, if Jesus or Moses had a freed slave in your land, would you not have gone to visit him?

He was not offended for his own sake. He was reminding the governor what it meant that he had served the final Messenger of Allah ﷺ. The man carried the letter, and the governor leapt up as if a war had broken out, and rushed to Thawban's bedside. Sit beside me, Thawban said, and let me narrate to you from the Prophet ﷺ. Are you listening? I am listening. And he gave him a hadith to strive for: that seventy thousand of this nation will enter Paradise with no reckoning and no punishment, and with every thousand, another seventy thousand. A standard, held out to a powerful man at the end of a poor man's life: be the best version of yourself; aim for the highest company.

Thawban surely longed to be among those seventy thousand. He died in the fifty-fourth year after the Hijrah, decades after the one he loved, having spent every one of those decades unable to live in the city where the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was no longer walking.

What Thawban's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a love like Thawban's and treat it as a beautiful thing that happened to someone else, in another time, with the Prophet ﷺ present in flesh before him. That would be to miss what his life is asking of us. He is not a curiosity to admire. He is a question put to our own hearts.

His love was not a feeling he kept private; it shaped how he spent his hours. He waited at the door each morning. He could not rest when he was apart from the one he loved. Ask yourself honestly how your heart moves toward Allah and His Messenger ﷺ. Do we long for the prayer the way Thawban longed for the face of the Prophet ﷺ, or do we treat the meeting with our Lord as something to be hurried through and gotten past? The love is meant to be costly. It is meant to reorder the day around the thing we say we love. If our devotion never disturbs our comfort, never makes us restless to draw nearer, it may not yet be love at all. The door to that love is still open: it is built by drawing near, by sitting with the words of Allah, by serving Him in the small unwatched moments the way Thawban climbed down for his own whip when no one was looking.

And his fear was the right fear. He was not afraid of poverty or of people. He was afraid of separation, of reaching the end and finding himself far from the one he loved. That is the fear worth carrying. We spend so much anxiety on losses that will not matter in the grave, and so little on the only loss that is final. Let his grief teach yours where to point. Fear the distance between you and Allah, and let that fear move you, today, toward one act of obedience you have been delaying.

Then take the comfort that Allah gave him, because it was given to you too. The verse did not come down for Thawban alone.

Whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger will be among those He has blessed. This is the promise that should steady an ordinary life: that the love you cannot always feel, and the nearness you cannot yet see, are not lost. Obedience is the road to the company you long for. You will be gathered with the ones you love, not because you were noble or famous or free of every fault, but because you obeyed, and held on, and let your heart lean toward Him.

So take one thing from Thawban into your week. Pray one prayer slowly, as a meeting and not a chore. Do one good deed for Allah that no eye will ever record, the way he climbed down for his whip. And when you make sujud, make it long, the way he taught the man in Damascus, knowing that each prostration lifts you one degree and wipes away one sin, and draws you one step nearer to the company you were made for. May Allah be pleased with Thawban, fill our hearts with a measure of his longing, and gather us with the ones we love, in the company of the prophets, the truthful, the witnesses, and the righteous.

This chapter follows the account of Thawban (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (4:69). Where the histories carry weaker or multiple narrations, this has been noted or the most widely reported account followed.

Safina

The Freed Slave of the Prophet ﷺ

There is a man in the books of hadith whose own name is lost to us. We do not know for certain what his mother called him at birth. The histories offer four possibilities and settle on none of them. We do not know the name of his father. When you trace him back, the chain simply stops: Safina, son of we-do-not-know. And yet this man, whose given name slipped quietly out of memory, carried for the rest of his life a name that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ gave him on a single afternoon, and he wore it as the proudest thing he owned.

His name became Safina. It means a ship. And the whole of his short, luminous biography turns on the question of what it means to be one.

A man easily overlooked

To understand Safina (may Allah be pleased with him), you have to understand the kind of person he was, and the kind of person the world of his time was built to ignore. He belonged to a particular circle around the Prophet ﷺ: the mawali, the freed slaves who attached themselves to the Messenger of Allah after he had set them free. Some of them, like Bilal and Zayd ibn Harithah, have long and detailed lives recorded for us. But many of them are quiet figures. They surface in the chains of narration with a single phrase, "the freed slave of the Prophet ﷺ," and

then they are gone. One story, sometimes two, is all that survives.

This is its own kind of lesson. Slavery in that age was the rule of the world, not the exception, and almost everywhere it was cruel. The ordinary condition of a slave was to wait, with a kind of buried bitterness, for the death of the one who owned him, so that the waiting might end. What you find again and again with the people the Prophet ﷺ freed is the exact opposite of that. Their greatest honor was to be attached to him. Their greatest grief, when it came, was his death. He treated the lowest people in his society with such care that, once freed, they did not want to leave his side. That alone tells you something about the man they followed.

Safina was one of these. He had no tribe to boast of, no wealth, none of the things that made a man visible in a society built on lineage and pride. In the eyes of Makkah, he was nobody. But the Prophet ﷺ saw him, and named him, and in doing so handed him an identity that outlasted every nobleman of his age.

How he came into the Prophet's house

Before he was the freed slave of the Prophet ﷺ, Safina belonged to Umm Salamah (may Allah be pleased with her), one of the great women of Islam. To understand how he was freed, you have to stand for a moment inside her grief.

Umm Salamah had been married to Abu Salamah, one of the earliest and noblest of the companions: a man of the two migrations, a veteran of Badr, a believer of high rank. When he died, she was certain she would never know a better husband. She used to say it plainly: when Abu Salamah passed away, she asked herself, who could there possibly be better than Abu

Salamah? She turned down proposal after proposal carrying that question in her heart. She had been taught by the Prophet ﷺ to say a particular supplication in her loss: O Allah, reward me in my affliction and give me something better than it in its place. She said the words, but she could not imagine what better than Abu Salamah might look like.

Then the Prophet ﷺ himself proposed to her. And here was the one man about whom there could be no argument. She might have said her husband was better than Abu Bakr or Umar and no one would have faulted her love. But the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was the best of all creation. The supplication had been answered in a way larger than she had dared to picture.

It is at this hinge of her life that Safina appears. As she prepared to enter the household of the Prophet ﷺ, Umm Salamah freed her slave, Safina, and she did it with a single condition, not a condition of bondage, but a gift of nearness. She freed him on the understanding that he would serve the Prophet ﷺ for as long as the Prophet lived. So Safina walked out of slavery and straight into the service of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He was no longer owned. He was free. But he was bound by something stronger than ownership: a debt of love, freely accepted, to serve the best of men for the rest of his days.

The day he became a ship

So where do you find Safina in the life of the Prophet ﷺ? You find him on the road. When the Prophet ﷺ traveled, Safina traveled with him, and it was on one of these journeys that he earned the only name history remembers him by.

He told the story himself. We were with the Prophet ﷺ on a journey, he said. And as the caravan moved, Safina took it upon

himself to carry as much as he possibly could. He did not want to carry his own share. He wanted to carry everyone's. So the men of the caravan began to hand him their burdens. One gave him his sword. Another gave him his armor. Another his sword, another his armor, until Safina was bent under an enormous load, far more than was ever asked of him, simply because he could not bear to do less than his utmost in the service of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and his companions.

The Prophet ﷺ looked at this man buried under the weight of other people's belongings, and he said to him: you are nothing but a ship. Anta safina. A ship carries the heavy cargo of many across the water without complaint, holding it all, bearing it all, until everyone arrives. That is what the Prophet ﷺ saw in him.

And Safina took the name and never let it go. From that day he introduced himself by it. The Prophet ﷺ praised me, he would say, and called me a ship. So my name is Safina. I am a ship. A man who had lost his birth name to history found a new one in a moment of service, and he held it the way another man might hold a title or an inheritance.

There is something tender hidden in this small scene. In the world before Islam, people branded one another with the ugliest names they could find: a man's deformity, his flaw, his shame, turned into the word everyone called him by. The Prophet ﷺ did the reverse. He not only changed bad names to good ones, he gave people beautiful nicknames they had never had, and those names became precious to them for the rest of their lives. This is the living shape of what Allah commanded in His Book:

Believers, no one group of men should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them; no one group of women should jeer at another, who may after all be better than

them; do not speak ill of one another; do not use offensive nicknames for one another. How bad it is to be called a mischief-maker after accepting faith! Those who do not repent of this behaviour are evildoers.

QUR'AN 49:11

The scholars who reflect on Safina's story draw a quiet wisdom from it about how we name and speak to one another, especially our children. A name, said Ibn al-Qayyim, is an intention: when you call a child by a quality, you are saying, this is what I want you to become. A cruel nickname can settle into a soul like a curse, until the child begins to live down to it. A beautiful one can lift a person into the very quality you named. The Prophet ﷺ called a man a ship for carrying the loads of others, and the man spent the rest of his life being exactly that.

The lion on the shore

After the Prophet ﷺ died, Safina was released from the only bond he had ever cherished, the promise to serve him as long as he lived. So Safina withdrew. He settled in a valley called Batn Nakhlah, between Makkah and Ta'if, and lived a quiet life. He did not push his way into the political struggles of the age. He was not that kind of man. But it was in this quiet stretch of his life that the most famous story about him took place, and it has been told and retold among Muslims ever since.

Here it helps to know a distinction the scholars make between two kinds of wonders. A mujizah is the miracle of a prophet, given as a challenge and a proof: the Qur'an itself, the parting of the sea for Musa, the raising of the dead by Isa (peace be upon them). A karamah is something else. It is a gift Allah grants to a righteous servant, not as a challenge to anyone, but as a mercy in a moment of need, brought on by that servant's piety and

reliance upon Him. Allah names these two qualities together in His Book, in the words the Prophet ﷺ and his companions knew well:

When they have completed their appointed term, either keep them honourably, or part with them honourably. Call two just witnesses from your people and establish witness for the sake of God. Anyone who believes in God and the Last Day should heed this: God will find a way out for those who are mindful of Him, and will provide for them from an unexpected source; God will be enough for those who put their trust in Him. God achieves His purpose; God has set a due measure for everything.

QUR'AN 65:2-3

Whoever is mindful of Allah, He makes a way out for him. Whoever puts his trust in Allah, Allah is enough for him. Hold those two promises in your mind, and now picture the scene.

Safina was on a ship, a man named for a ship now traveling on one, somewhere on the open water in the path of Allah. The vessel lost its way and broke down, and Safina found himself cast onto an island. And there, on that strange shore, a lion came toward him.

Think about what a person would ordinarily do. Run. Try to calm the animal. Try to feed it something, or someone. But Safina did none of these. As the lion approached, he turned to face it and spoke to it. O lion, he said, I am Safina, the freed slave of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

And the lion stopped where it stood.

He did not announce himself by tribe or by ancestry. He did not say, I am the son of so-and-so, I am a man of such-and-such a clan. He had none of that, and he wanted none of it. The one

thing he claimed, the only banner he raised before a predator, was his attachment to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Then he gave the animal a command: guide us along the path. And the lion, the scholars say, humbled itself and walked ahead of them, leading Safina and his companions across that island until they were safe, as though it had been set there to serve them. Safina even said that as the lion turned to go, it was as if the creature were giving him salaam.

There are two things to take from this beyond the obvious, beyond the piety of the man and his trust in his Lord. The first is what it reveals about the Prophet ﷺ. He was honored not only by people but by the creation itself, by the trees, by the animals. The mere mention of service to him put a lion in its place. It was as if Allah caused that animal to reason: this man served My Messenger, so I will serve him. The second is the nature of the gift. Which prophet had once commanded the animals? Sulaiman (peace be upon him), who ruled over armies of them. Sulaiman commanded multitudes; Safina, by the grace of Allah, was given the command of one. The wonders of the righteous are small echoes of the great signs of the prophets who came before them, extensions of a single light.

But notice where the whole miracle began. It began with a sentence. I am the freed slave of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Safina knew exactly who he was, and that certainty, spoken aloud to a lion, was the doorway through which Allah's help came.

The quiet witness

Safina lived a long life, until around the year seventy after the migration. Fourteen narrations are preserved from him, carried forward by his sons Umar and Abd al-Rahman, and learned from

him by men of the next generation, among them the great Hasan al-Basri. He was never a scholar of wide learning. He had no school, no circle of students, no body of rulings. He was, to the end, the quiet companion who had once carried everyone's swords.

And yet, at one of the most fraught moments in the early history of the Muslims, this quiet man held a piece of truth that mattered. He had lived to see the fitna, the trials and divisions that tore at the community, though he never entered the political arena himself. When people around him were trying to make sense of what was happening, of who held legitimate authority and how a believer should understand the upheaval, Safina remembered something the Prophet ﷺ had said. The rightly guided caliphate in my nation, the Prophet ﷺ had told him, will last thirty years, and then it will become kingship.

Safina did the arithmetic plainly. Hold on, he said: the caliphate of Abu Bakr, then Umar, then Uthman, and then the caliphate of Ali. Count the years, and you find thirty, exactly as the Prophet ﷺ had foretold. When someone pointed out to him that the Banu Umayyah claimed the caliphate was theirs, Safina cut through it without hesitation. They have not told the truth, he said. They are kings. The age of the rightly guided caliphate had closed, and the age of kingship had begun, just as he had been told it would.

It is a striking thing. A man with nothing of scholarship to offer the ummah was entrusted with a single, decisive truth, and he preserved it, and he spoke it at the moment it was needed. The man who carried other people's burdens on the road ended up carrying, for all of us, one of the clearest words on a hard and divisive question. Allah does not measure the worth of His servants by the size of their fame.

What Safina's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to close the book on Safina with a smile, a charming story about a man and a lion, and move on. That would be to miss what his life is actually for. His life is short, but it puts a sharp question to our own iman, and it is worth sitting with.

Begin with the lion on the shore. When death came walking toward him in the shape of a beast, Safina did not reach for his lineage, his wealth, or his rank, because he had none, and because he had learned that none of those things are what save a person. He reached for one thing only: I belong to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. That was his whole identity, and it was enough. Ask yourself, honestly, what you would reach for in your own moment of fear. We spend so much of our lives building names for ourselves out of the very things the world rewards, our positions, our possessions, our family names, and we forget that the only attachment that will ever protect us is our attachment to Allah and to His Messenger ﷺ. Safina's certainty before the lion was not bravado. It was the natural overflow of a man who knew where his safety truly lay, and had staked everything on it. That is tawakkul: not the absence of danger, but the presence of trust strong enough to speak calmly in front of it. Allah promised that whoever relies on Him, He is enough for him, and Safina lived as a man who believed that promise with his whole body.

Then look at how he became a ship in the first place. He carried more than was asked of him, not for praise, not because anyone demanded it, but because he could not bear to give less than his utmost in serving the cause of the Prophet ﷺ. There was no audience he was performing for. He simply wanted to be the most useful person in the caravan, for the sake of Allah. This is the quality to take into your own ordinary days. You do not need a grand stage to live like Safina. You need only to carry a little more

of the load than you are obligated to: the task no one will thank you for, the help offered before it is requested, the burden quietly lifted off someone else's shoulders. Do it the way he did it, for Allah, expecting nothing back from people. That is sincerity. And notice what Allah did with it: a small, sincere act of service became the name by which a man is honored across the centuries.

And here is the part that should settle deep in the heart. Safina was, by every worldly measure, a forgettable man. No tribe, no riches, no scholarship, even his birth name erased. The world had every reason to pass over him. And yet Allah gave this man a miracle that prophets' legacies are woven through, set a piece of prophetic truth in his keeping, and raised his quiet life into something Muslims would speak of with wonder for a thousand years and more. What looked like a life of no consequence was, in the sight of Allah, a life of immense weight. This is the promise that should change how you measure your own days: Allah does not need you to be seen by people to honor you, and the smallness of your station in this world says nothing at all about your station with Him. The mindful and the trusting, He lifts from where no one is looking.

So take one thing from Safina into your life this week. Carry a burden that is not yours to carry, quietly, for Allah, and tell no one. Anchor your sense of who you are not in what people would call you, but in the fact that you belong to Allah and follow His Messenger ﷺ. And when fear comes, and it will, meet it the way he met the lion, with a heart that already knows where its safety is. The Prophet ﷺ once asked, in effect, what good quality he would have named you by, had he seen you. It is worth asking yourself in private. And it is worth living, from today, so that the name Allah and His angels know you by is a beautiful one. May

Allah be pleased with Safina, the freed slave of His Messenger ﷺ, and grant us a measure of his trust, his sincerity, and his quiet, faithful service.

This chapter follows the account of Safina (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (49:11, 65:2-3). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Julaybib

The One the Prophet Claimed

There was a man in Madinah whose family name no one recorded. There was a man whose tribe no one can name, whose region no one can place, whose face the people of the city mocked in passing. History, which preserved the lineages of kings and the genealogies of chiefs, did not think him worth remembering. And yet the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, standing on a battlefield with the dust still settling and the dead being counted, looked up at the sky and said of him three times, "This one is from me, and I am from him."

His name, the only name we have, was Julaybib (may Allah be pleased with him). It was not even his real name. To begin to understand what Allah did with this life, you have to first meet him the way the people of Madinah saw him, and then watch the One who sees differently than people see.

A man with nothing the world counts

We do not know where Julaybib came from. We do not know his tribe, his region, or his clan. It is said only that he was from somewhere, which is to say from nowhere that anyone would claim. He had no home that was his. He had no lineage to stand behind him. In a society built almost entirely on tribe and bloodline, where a man's worth was measured by the strength of the people who would defend him, Julaybib stood alone.

And he was described as deformed. He was extremely short, and the people commented on his appearance and belittled it. He was, in the plainest terms, a man who was bullied for the way he looked. Some narrations suggest his skin was very dark, and so to the social weight already pressing on him you may add the cruelty of racism. Sit for a moment with the full stack of it. Here is a man with no tribe, so tribalism is against him. A man whose appearance is mocked, so the shallow vanity of people is against him. A man who is poor and has no money and no presence, so the worship of wealth is against him. A man, by some accounts, judged for the color of his skin, so racism is against him. Every single one of the diseases that a society carries, every ism that turns people away from each other, was lined up against this one man. If you wanted to design a person whom the world would overlook entirely, you could not do better than Julaybib.

But his heart was pure, and he was beloved to the Prophet ﷺ. When he walked through the masjid, he was a gentle soul, a sweet presence among people who had no use for him. And the Prophet ﷺ preferred him in his dealings. If there was a gathering, the Prophet ﷺ would bring him forward. If something was being given out, the Prophet ﷺ would bring him to the front of the line. While the city looked past Julaybib, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was deliberately, patiently, building him a place among them.

The name that was never changed

There is a quiet detail in his name that tells you more than a long biography could. "Julaybib" is a diminutive, a small and almost affectionate form of a word. The scholars say it comes from jilbab, the outer cloak a woman wraps herself in. So perhaps he was called this because he was always wrapped up, bundled in his garment as he moved through Madinah, a little cloaked figure

walking the streets. Perhaps it referred to the darkness of his skin, since the cloaks of the Muslims were often dark. Or perhaps, most tenderly, it was the name of an embrace: that someone, a grandmother maybe, once held him close and called him this little name out of warmth, and it simply stuck to him for the rest of his life.

We do not know which it was. But here is what we do know for certain. It was not a name of insult. How can we be sure? Because the Prophet ﷺ left it alone. It was the way of the Prophet ﷺ never to call a person by a name that carried something ugly in it, and to change any name that implied something negative, even if the one carrying that name was the most powerful person in society. He would not let a person be defined by a cruel word. So if "Julaybib" had been a mockery, the Prophet ﷺ would have lifted it off him. He did not. The name stayed. Which means that whatever the world intended by it, in the hearing of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ it was a name worth keeping.

So we are left with this striking fact: we do not know his family name, and we do not even know his first name. "Julaybib" is only what he was called. A man known to history by a borrowed, affectionate little word, and by nothing else the world thought worth writing down.

The harshness of men and the softness he sought

Julaybib has a narration about himself, and it opens a window into his loneliness. He used to spend his time among the women of Madinah. He would enter upon them freely and talk with them, and the implication is that he turned to them because he had found harshness and bullying among the men. This was in the earliest days, before the verses of hijab were revealed, when the

boundaries of society were still being shaped and there was a learning curve for everyone. But notice the human truth underneath it. A man mocked and pushed aside by the men of the city drifted toward the only people who showed him gentleness. He was not seeking anything improper. He was seeking softness, because the world of men had only ever shown him its hard edge.

One of the Companions narrates this. He admits, with disarming honesty, that he himself had been a jealous man, and that even though Julaybib was the one people called ugly and small and unremarkable, it still unsettled him that this young man was always present among the women of his household. He had even warned that Julaybib should not enter upon them again. There was no command yet forbidding it; it was simply, as he says, his own jealousy. He tells us this, it seems, because of what came afterward, when he learned what Julaybib truly was in the sight of the Prophet ﷺ, and how small his own judgment had been.

The proposal that changed a household

He continues, and here the story turns into something luminous.

It was the custom of the Ansar that when one of their women became a widow, or when a daughter or sister became ready for marriage, they would hold back before giving her to anyone else, just in case the Prophet ﷺ himself might have an interest. It was a one in a million hope, but they loved him so completely that they left the window open. If there was even the slightest chance that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ might ask for their daughter's hand, they wanted to be available to that honor. You feel, in that small custom, how much these people loved their Prophet ﷺ, how they would have given him anything, how he never even

needed to marry among them to win their hearts, because their hearts were already entirely his.

So the Prophet ﷺ came to a man of the Ansar and said that he had come to propose marriage. The household lit up. What a blessing, what an honor, the best son in law a family could dream of, the best in laws a person could hope for. And then the Prophet ﷺ said, "I am not asking for her for myself." Oh. Well, even so, whoever the Prophet ﷺ was proposing on behalf of must surely be a man of high caliber. The father, not wanting to answer for the whole family, said he would go and consult the girl's mother.

Imagine the Prophet ﷺ sitting in the front room of the house while the father goes inside. He tells his wife that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ has come to propose. She cuts him off in her excitement, mashallah, of course, what an honor, he can have her, everything we have is his. And then he says: it is not for him. It is for Julaybib.

She knew exactly who Julaybib was. And in an instant the most joyful day of that household's life curdled into what felt like an insult. She began to cry out, loud enough that the Prophet ﷺ could hear her from the other room, "By Allah, no. We will not marry our daughter to Julaybib." The blessing had become, in her mind, a humiliation.

And then the daughter spoke.

"The Prophet would not lose me"

She had heard her mother shouting at her father. From behind the curtain, she asked who was being proposed to her, and on whose behalf. When she understood that it was the Prophet ﷺ himself who had come, she set aside everything else. She said to her parents, "Are you going to turn away the Messenger of Allah ﷺ?"

Marry me to him, for the Prophet ﷺ would not let me go to waste."

The Prophet ﷺ would not lose me. The Prophet ﷺ knows what he is doing. He would never let me come to ruin. Pause and consider what kind of faith produces a sentence like that from a young woman, beautiful and from a notable family, with every worldly reason to refuse. She did not weigh Julaybib's height or his poverty or what the city would whisper about her afterward. She weighed one thing only: the Messenger of Allah ﷺ had chosen this for her, and that was enough. If he had arranged it, then good must be in it, even if her eyes could not yet see the good.

The scholars connect her response to a verse that some say was revealed around this very kind of situation, the verse that settles forever the question of what a believer does when Allah and His Messenger ﷺ have decided a matter:

When God and His Messenger have decided on a matter that concerns them, it is not fitting for any believing man or woman to claim freedom of choice in that matter: whoever disobeys God and His Messenger is far astray.

QUR'AN 33:36

It must be said clearly that the Prophet ﷺ never forced a marriage. It was understood in Madinah that if a family said no, he would simply walk away. He came, again and again across many stories, as an intercessor, saying, "I come as one interceding on behalf of another." And think of what an honor that was in itself: that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ would be the one to carry your proposal, that he would take it upon himself to find a wife for a man who had no royal tribe and no powerful family to

speak for him. He stepped into that role himself, for the very people the world ignored.

So the girl told her parents to accept. And the Prophet ﷺ made a dua for her, a dua so beautiful that it is worth carrying for anyone you love. He asked Allah to pour good upon her, and good upon that good, and good upon that, and to not make her life one hardship after another. He prayed it precisely because she had trusted that he would not lose her, and so he turned to Allah and asked that her life be made easy and not hard. And she would need it, because there was the tribal pressure to bear, and parents who had not wanted this, and a city that would now have things to say about her. She married him anyway.

"He is from me, and I am from him"

The only other story we have of Julaybib himself is the story of his death.

The Prophet ﷺ went out on a battle, and he took the Ansar with him. Julaybib did not make an excuse. The same young man who avoided the gatherings of the men because of the harshness and the bullying did not shy away when the call came to fight. He took up a sword and went out onto the battlefield and fought alongside the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. That alone tells you something about the courage hidden inside that small, mocked frame. The cruelty of people had not made him a coward; it had not poisoned his loyalty. When his Prophet ﷺ needed men, Julaybib was a man.

The battle ended. The dust settled. There was a calm in the air, the calm that follows a clear victory. The Prophet ﷺ began to ask, going through the tribes, "Are you missing anyone? Are you missing anyone?" One sub tribe did a headcount and said, all

praise to Allah, we have all our men. Another counted their losses and named them. Group by group the Prophet ﷺ went, and group by group they reported. And when he had finished asking them all, when every tribe had accounted for its own, the Prophet ﷺ said, "But I am missing Julaybib."

Imagine the weight of that. The tribes count their own; the Prophet ﷺ counts a man who had no tribe to count him. No one was missing Julaybib, because Julaybib belonged to no one, and so he belonged to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. "But I am missing Julaybib." That little phrase contains a whole sermon about who matters and who is overlooked.

They went out to search for his body. They found him lying on the battlefield, and around him lay seven men of the enemy that he had killed before they killed him. Seven. To understand what that means, remember how few the casualties were in these early battles; seven men could account for a tenth of the losses on the other side. This was no small feat of arms. They found his small body with his sword beside him, ringed by the seven he had felled. And the Prophet ﷺ confirmed it: "He killed seven, and then they killed him."

That man you would have passed in the street without a second glance had fought with such courage that he took seven of the enemy with him before he fell.

Then the Prophet ﷺ knelt down over him and said the words that were sweetness to the ears of every Companion. He looked up to the sky and said, "O Allah, this one is from me, and I am from him." He said it three times. Not merely "he is one of my people," though even that would have been an immense honor. He said the Prophet is part of him, and he is part of the Prophet ﷺ. And then, because Julaybib was so small, the Prophet ﷺ scooped his

body up into his own arms and held him. He dug the grave himself. He laid Julaybib into it with his own two hands.

The man with no tribe was buried by the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in person. The man the city called ugly was carried in the arms of the most beloved of all creation. Every ism that had been stacked against him, the tribalism, the classism, the mockery of his face, the prejudice against his color, all of it went out the window with eight words: "This one is from me, and I am from him."

What Julaybib's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read this story and feel only a warm sympathy for an underdog, to be moved the way one is moved by a film. That would be to miss what his life is actually asking. Julaybib is not here to make us feel better about the overlooked. He is here to put a question to our own iman.

Begin with the woman who married him, because her faith is the gate to his whole story. When she said, "The Prophet would not lose me," she was saying something about Allah before she was saying anything about a man. She trusted that what had been chosen for her by the one Allah sent must be good, even before she could see the good with her own eyes. That is the very nerve of faith: to trust Allah and His decree before the outcome is visible, to accept what He has written for you while it still looks, to the world and even to your own mother, like a loss. How much of our restlessness comes from the opposite, from demanding to see the good first, from refusing to be content until we have inspected the wisdom and approved it? She did not lose anything. She was later blessed with wealth, and it is said there was no widow among the Ansar who gave more in charity than she did. The dua of the Prophet ﷺ, "pour good upon her," landed exactly. What looked like the ruin of a young woman's prospects

was, in truth, the door to a life of barakah. Ask yourself where in your own life you are still arguing with a decree that may be the very mercy you would have chosen, had you been able to see what Allah sees.

Then there is Julaybib himself, and the lesson he carries is about whose gaze you are living for. The whole world looked at him and saw nothing. No tribe, no money, no beauty, no name worth recording. And it did not matter in the slightest, because Allah knew him. This is the quality to take from him and hold: to live for the sight of Allah and not for the eyes of people. The people of Madinah ranked him at the bottom; Allah seated him in a station so high that His Messenger ﷺ called him part of himself. There is a freedom in this that most of us never taste, because we spend our days arranging ourselves to be seen and approved by others, performing for an audience that will forget us. Julaybib never had that audience, and so he had only Allah, and that turned out to be everything. The Prophet ﷺ taught that there are people dusty and disheveled, turned away from the doors of men, who if they were to swear an oath upon Allah, Allah would honor it, out of the reverence He holds for them. Julaybib is one of those people. The world's scale and Allah's scale are not the same scale, and on the day it counts, only one of them will be weighed.

So carry something concrete from this life into your own ordinary days, and do it for Allah. The next time you are tempted to measure a person by their appearance, their accent, their tribe, their bank account, stop, and remember the man the Prophet ﷺ carried in his arms. Honor the one the room ignores. Sit with the person no one sits with. Give to someone who can never raise your standing by receiving it. And in your own heart, loosen the grip that the opinions of people have on you, and tighten your hold on the only opinion that lasts. Do one good deed today that

no one will see and no one will praise, purely because Allah sees it, the way Julaybib lived a whole life that no one recorded, while Heaven was writing every line of it.

May Allah be pleased with Julaybib, the one whom the Prophet ﷺ claimed as his own. May He teach us to see with something of His sight, to value what He values, and to be content with what He chooses for us. And may He gather us with the ones He honored when the world looked away, under the throne of the Most Merciful, in the company of the Messenger sent as a mercy ﷺ.

This chapter follows the account of Julaybib (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (33:36). Where the histories carry more than one explanation, as with the meaning of his name, the reported possibilities have been presented as such.

Zahir ibn Haram

The Beloved of the Desert

There is a particular kind of person every city knows and no city remembers. He comes in from the edges. He brings something small to sell, lingers at the market, and goes home before nightfall to a place no one important has ever visited. He is not rich. He is not well-connected. He is not, by the world's quick reckoning, anyone you would name. Zahir ibn Haram was that person. And the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ looked at him and saw a man worth more than the whole market he was standing in.

To understand why his story matters, you have to understand what he came from, and how little the world around him expected of a man like him.

A man from the edge of the map

Zahir ibn Haram (may Allah be pleased with him) was a bedouin, one of the desert Arabs who lived on the outskirts of Madinah, to the north and northwest of the city. He belonged to the tribe of Banu Muzaynah, one of the northern Arab tribes whose lands ringed the city like a frontier. These were not the polished people of the towns. They were rough, hardy folk who knew how to survive in the desert and how to keep their own. They were also, by reputation, deeply tribal, bound tightly to their alliances and their old ways, and slow to trust anything new.

It helps to picture the geography. When the Prophet ﷺ later came to Madinah, the city was protected on some sides by its natural defenses: two black volcanic plains, the two harras, that an attacking army could not easily cross. That is part of why, when the great siege came, the trench, al-Khandaq, was dug to seal the one open approach. But the city was never fully safe. There were the hypocrites within, the tribes who had broken faith, and beyond all of them, the Arab tribes of the surrounding desert who did not like the rising power of this new community.

Their hostility was rarely about belief. Most of them did not care much about religion at all. They were not lying awake wondering about the meaning of life. They wanted to milk their goats, mind their herds, keep their families fed, and be left to the world they already understood. The new message in Madinah unsettled that world. It was unfamiliar, and the unfamiliar felt like a threat to their alliances and their trade. So when the call came to wipe this community out before it grew too strong, many of those tribes signed on. Banu Muzaynah was among the closest of them to Madinah, near enough to come down and trade day to day, and for a long time distant enough in heart to keep their distance from the faith.

That is the world Zahir came from. And within that world, he carried a second burden heavier than tribe or geography. The narrations tell us plainly: he was poor, he was without a notable clan to shield him, he was a young man, and he was not pleasant to look upon. He was, in some way, deformed in his body. He did not feel good about himself. He walked through life with the quiet, settled belief that he was worth very little, and that everyone around him knew it.

The man who never came empty-handed

Most desert folk who came to Madinah did their business at the edges, the way you might drive out to buy fruit from a farm and never enter the house. But Zahir was different. On one of his trips he came all the way in, and there he learned what the Prophet ﷺ was teaching, and he embraced Islam.

From then on, something tender began. Zahir never came to Madinah without bringing a gift for the Prophet ﷺ. Picture what a poor bedouin has to give: not gold, not fine cloth. Some fruit, perhaps. A few vegetables, some plant from the desert. Maybe a small container of milk or clarified fat carried in from the herds. It was never much. But it was his, and he never arrived without it.

And here the relationship reveals itself, because the Prophet ﷺ never let that gift go unanswered. Zahir never came to Madinah except that the Prophet ﷺ sent him home with something better. New clothes. An outfit. Some perfume or some small treasure from the city to carry back to the desert. It was as though the Prophet ﷺ kept a quiet stockpile set aside just for him. When Zahir arrived, the Prophet ﷺ would say, in effect, you have brought me something, and I have something for you. And if he had nothing ready on the spot, he would go and buy the young man new clothes, hand them to him, and send him on his way honored: take this for what you brought, and go in peace.

It is a small economy of love, and it changes nothing about the price of fruit. A container of milk is worth a container of milk. But the Prophet ﷺ was never trading in fruit. He was telling a young man who believed he was worth nothing that his small gift mattered, that he was seen, that he was awaited.

The most famous words spoken about him

Then the Prophet ﷺ said the words that everyone remembers, though they cannot be fully understood without the world we have just walked through. He said that Zahir was their bedouin, their man of the desert. "Zahir is our badawi, and we are his city."

He was not saying that Zahir was a possession, that he belonged to them like property. He was saying something far warmer. He was saying: Zahir is our relative who lives out in the desert. Zahir is family, the one of ours who happens to live among the herds and the dunes. Every settled person has someone like that, a cousin out on the farm, a relation living rough on the outskirts. The Prophet ﷺ claimed Zahir as exactly that, as kin.

Try to feel what that did. Imagine sitting in the mosque when this young man walks in from the desert, this man with low self-esteem who has spent his life certain he is no one, who does not feel good about how he looks or what he has. And the Prophet ﷺ looks up and brightens and says, Zahir, come here, I have something for you. He would rise to meet him. He would embrace him. He would care for him until the day Zahir chose to return to the desert, and then he would send him off with whatever he needed to make the journey home. The Prophet ﷺ could have chosen anyone to call family from the outskirts. He chose Zahir. In a single sentence, the worth of a man who thought himself worthless was lifted up in front of the whole community.

The day in the marketplace

The most pivotal moment between them happened in the market, and it is one of the most beloved scenes in all the reports of the Prophet's life.

Zahir was there among the stalls, the outsider doing his small trade, selling whatever he had carried in from the desert, a little

fruit, some cloth, busy with his buying and selling. The Prophet ﷺ, who was always looking out for him just as Zahir was always looking out for the Prophet ﷺ, caught sight of him and was delighted. But he did not walk up and greet him in the ordinary way. He came at him from behind, quietly, and suddenly seized hold of him, and began to call out over the crowd: "Who will buy this slave from me? Who will buy this slave from me?"

Zahir could not see who had grabbed him. He struggled, saying, let me go, let me go. Then he realized who was holding him, and everything changed. He stopped fighting. He pressed his back against the chest of the Prophet ﷺ and let himself be held as long as the Prophet ﷺ wished to hold him, drinking in the nearness of it. The Prophet ﷺ was laughing. Zahir was laughing. The companions were watching this endearing thing unfold in the middle of the marketplace: the Messenger of Allah ﷺ playing, joking, lavishing affection on the very man the world had decided was beneath notice.

And then Zahir said the thing that revealed the wound he carried. He said, more or less: O Messenger of Allah, you would find no one willing to buy me. You would find me cheap. If I really were a slave for sale, I would fetch almost nothing, because no one would want me.

It was a joke about himself, the kind a person makes when they have long since accepted the world's low estimate of them. And here is where lesser men would have laughed along, or let it pass, or piled on. The Prophet ﷺ did none of that. He turned the young man around to face him. And he said: but in the sight of Allah, you are not cheap. In the sight of Allah, you are precious. You are worth a very great deal. Do not belittle yourself, for to Allah, you are priceless.

That single sentence was built to last a lifetime. For however long Zahir lived after that, in the desert, among the herds, far from the mosque and the market, he could replay it in his heart: I am priceless in the sight of Allah. Imagine carrying that into your prayer, into your loneliness, into the hours when the old voice returns to tell you that you are no one. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ froze the moment, refused to let the self-mockery stand, and pressed a different truth into the man's chest. Not the world's price. Allah's.

A possible place among the best

We do not know much more about him. It is very likely that Zahir eventually went back to the desert and died there, as people of the desert lived and died and were buried without record. Banu Muzaynah never became a celebrated tribe after Islam. They came to the faith eventually, when the wider Arab world came, and then they got on with their ordinary lives, and the histories did not follow them closely. Outside of Zahir, the one truly famous companion from that tribe is Nu'aym ibn Mas'ud, who one day helped break the Confederate alliance from within during the siege, by moving among the enemy while they had no idea where his heart truly lay.

But there is one more thing we may know about Zahir, and it is not a small thing. Ibn Abd al-Barr counted him among the people of Badr, those who stood with the Prophet ﷺ at the first great battle. If that is so, then this young man belonged to the most elite company in the entire ummah. For the people of Badr were the best, no matter who they had been before. It was asked of the Prophet ﷺ how he regarded the people of Badr among the believers, and he said they were the best of them. Jabir said the

same: they are the best of us, just as the angels who fought at Badr are the best of the angels.

So consider it. This young man, who thought so little of himself, who joked that no one would buy him, may belong to the most honored group of human beings ever gathered, and all the world knows of him is that he was Zahir, the one who looked down on himself, whom the Prophet ﷺ would not let stay low.

Mercy that builds and never breaks

There is a lesson in this that is gentle on the surface and very serious underneath. The Prophet ﷺ had humor. He laughed, he played, he teased. But he never once used his humor to break a person. His jokes lifted the mood and lifted the man. They built people up. This is consistent across everything we know of how he ﷺ joked.

People can be cruel with their jokes and hide the cruelty behind the word "joke," the way someone excuses backbiting by saying they would say it to the person's face. But a joke known to wound, known to tear someone down, is not made innocent by being funny. The Prophet ﷺ taught his companions to be truthful when they joke, and the scholars understood this to mean more than not lying in jest. It means having a truthful, good aim in the joke itself. Ask what you are trying to achieve. To lighten the mood? Good. To bring some goodness among people? Good. To build someone's confidence, the way the Prophet ﷺ built Zahir's? That is the most beautiful and noble use of laughter there is.

So be careful when you joke about how people look. Be careful when you joke about their weaknesses, about the soft places they cannot defend. Often a person laughs along not because

they enjoy it, but because they lack the confidence to object, or do not want the fight. And a cruel nickname, a small mockery, can stick to someone for the rest of their life, accepted by the family and the friends, quietly hated by the one who wears it. If the Prophet ﷺ had piled onto Zahir's joke, if he had laughed and said, you are right, no one would want you, the man would have laughed too, and gone home crushed, replaying that instead. Because he did the opposite, Zahir went home with a sentence that could carry him for years.

What Zahir's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read this story and take from it only a lesson about kindness, to resolve to be a little gentler with our jokes. That is good, but it is not the heart of it. The heart of it is what the Prophet ﷺ actually said in the marketplace. He did not tell Zahir that he was valuable to the community, or useful, or likeable. He told him he was priceless to Allah. He moved the man's worth out of the hands of people and placed it where it could never be lost: in the sight of his Lord.

That is the question this life puts to your own iman. Whose estimate of you do you live by? Almost all of us carry some version of Zahir's wound, some quiet belief that we are not enough, built up from a body we did not choose, a status the world did not grant, a comparison we keep losing. We hand our sense of worth to people, to the market, to the faces in the crowd, and they price us cheaply, and we believe them. The Prophet ﷺ turned a man around and refused to let him do that. He pointed him to Allah, in whose sight a poor, plain bedouin with no tribe and no fortune may stand among the people of Badr, among the best of creation. Your worth is not what the world will

pay for you. It is what you are to Allah, and that is beyond any price.

This frees something in the believer. If your value rests with Allah, then you do not need to perform for the crowd, and you do not need to fear it either. You can do the small, unseen good the way Zahir brought his small gifts: a container of milk, a handful of fruit, nothing the world would notice, offered anyway, because the One who matters sees it. The sincerity in giving a thing too small to impress anyone is a sincerity for Allah alone. So bring your small gift today, the prayer no one watches, the charity no one counts, the kindness to someone the world overlooks, and do not measure it by how the crowd receives it. Measure it by the One to whom nothing offered in love is ever cheap.

And there is a debt here too, owed to the people around you who carry Zahir's wound. You will meet them: the one who jokes that they are no good, the one who shrinks at the edge of the room, the one everybody has quietly priced low. The Prophet ﷺ did not let such a person stay low. He noticed him, awaited him, embraced him, and pressed the truth into his chest. You can do a smaller version of that for the sake of Allah. Notice the overlooked one. Tell them, and mean it, that Allah does not reckon by the measures that wounded them. Let your words build and not break, because you never know that the person you are speaking to may be, in the sight of Allah, among the best of those alive.

May Allah be pleased with Zahir ibn Haram, who came in from the desert with little and left as the beloved of the Messenger ﷺ, and may Allah teach our hearts to seek our worth where he found his: not in the eyes of people, but in the sight of the One to whom no sincere soul is ever cheap.

This chapter follows the account of Zahir ibn Haram (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). No Qur'anic verse is quoted, as the lecture cites none directly. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Umm Mahjan

The Woman Who Cleaned the Masjid

There are people in every community who pass through it like air. No one greets them. No one asks after them. They come and they go, and afterward no one can quite remember whether they were there. The more deeply involved you are in the affairs of a place, the more its leaders and its busy people, the easier it becomes to look straight past them. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ did the opposite. He not only noticed such people, he raised them to a station that the noble and the well-known never reached. And one of the clearest proofs of this is a woman whose full name history barely preserved, a freed slave from Africa, who used to sweep the floor of his mosque after everyone else had gone home.

Her name reaches us as Umm Mahjan (may Allah be pleased with her), though even that is uncertain. We do not know her father. We do not know her tribe. We do not know the land she was born in beyond that she came from Habasha, from somewhere in Africa, in the broadest sense the word can carry. Almost everything about her has to be pieced together from a handful of narrations, and even then a scholar has to pause and say, carefully, that this is likely the same woman being spoken of here. The world that produced her did not bother to write her down. Allah did. And in His record, she became royalty.

A mosque is not only built, it is tended

To understand why she matters, you have to understand what the mosque meant in those years. A companion once wrote a letter to his son, far away, instructing him in the religion, and among the things he passed on was this: the Prophet ﷺ commanded them to build mosques in their neighborhoods, and then to keep them well, to keep them clean, to keep them pure. Not simply to build and walk away. The upkeep was part of the command.

Think of how fast this took root. The Prophet ﷺ lived in Madinah for only a decade, yet there was a mosque in nearly every quarter of the city, and you can still find the traces of them today. The scholars who commented on that letter noted something striking: as Islam spread, the companions would build the mosque in a place before they built their own homes. It was a pattern with the weight of a sunnah behind it. When the Prophet ﷺ first came to Madinah, the mosque came before his own house. When the companions carried the religion outward, the mosque came before their houses too. A whole society had absorbed a single idea, that the center of the neighborhood is the house of Allah, and that its care belongs to everyone, the children growing up with that mindset and the adults living by it.

And the cleanliness was not an afterthought. There are whole chapters in the books of hadith about the scent of the mosque, about how it should smell, about coming to it with a clean mouth and a good fragrance and never bringing a foul odor into it. The Prophet ﷺ himself cleaned the mosque with his own hands. In one report he was seen scraping dried mucus off the minbar, which tells you exactly what kind of place this was: a place of rapid conversion, full of people who only yesterday did not know there was an unseen God at all, who had been raised to believe there was nothing beyond bones and dust, and who were now learning, sometimes clumsily, what it meant to honor a house of

Allah. People made mistakes there. One man relieved himself in a corner of it. They were learning. And through all of it the Prophet ﷺ was teaching, by his own hands, that the floor they prayed on was sacred.

The face that turned red, and the woman who scrubbed

There is a moment that may belong to her, and even if it does not, it tells us the world she lived in. One day the Prophet ﷺ saw something stuck to the wall or the floor of the mosque, spit or mucus, a great deal of it, left carelessly behind. His face changed. It turned red with displeasure, because someone had treated the house of Allah with that kind of disregard, and he was the sort of man who would have bent down and removed it himself rather than leave it.

A woman saw his face. She understood at once. She rose, scraped the filth away with her own hand, cleaned the spot, and then put perfume in its place. And the redness left his face, and he smiled, and he said what a beautiful thing she had just done. In the space of a moment he had gone from anger to joy, and the cause of the joy was the smallest possible act: a woman quietly cleaning a wall.

One of the scholars laid a beautiful meaning over this. The Prophet ﷺ once said he saw a man walking freely in Paradise because he had removed something harmful from the road, and he taught that the lowest branch of faith is to remove a harmful thing from the path. If that is the reward for clearing the public road, then what of clearing something harmful from the houses of Allah? So the next time you see a wrapper or a tissue on the floor of a mosque, do not see litter. See, lying there in front of you, a branch of your own faith, perhaps the very small deed that carries you through the gate.

From a slave girl to a daughter of light

There is a story behind her that explains the words she could not stop reciting, and the way the story ends is the reason scholars believe it is hers. One of the mothers of the believers said that there was a woman who used to clean the mosque in Madinah, and that she used to go and sit with her, and the two of them would talk, and she enjoyed her company. Hold that picture for a moment. The wife of the Prophet ﷺ sat in the corner of the emptied mosque, after the prayer, after the crowds had gone, talking with the woman who swept the floor. That is what the breaking down of every old barrier looks like.

The cleaning woman had a line of poetry she kept on her lips, the way many Arabs carried a single verse they hummed to themselves. Hers said that the day of the red scarf was an astonishing wonder from her Lord, and that by it He saved her from a disbelieving people. The mother of the believers finally asked her what it meant, and she sat her down and told her.

She had been a slave girl, she said, in the household of a powerful chief, and she was given charge of his young daughter. They were traveling, and the girl had a precious red scarf, something fine and bright. While the girl slept, a bird swooped down, seized the scarf, perhaps mistaking it for meat, and carried it off into the sky. The girl woke, found it gone, and cried out that her scarf had been stolen. The master turned at once to the one whose whole task was to watch while others slept. He demanded to know what had happened. She told him the truth: a bird took it. He answered that she could not even invent a more believable lie than that, a bird carrying off a scarf.

What followed was the plain cruelty of her world. They strung her up. They stripped her and searched her and beat her, leaving no

part of her untouched, a punishment for a theft she had not committed, the truth of her words counting for nothing against the suspicion of a slave. And in the middle of that, while they were still beating her, the bird came back. It dropped the red scarf down from the sky, right between them. The master saw it fall. He understood what he had done, and he was so ashamed that he set her free. Her freedom came from a bird, and from a God who answers when no human being will believe you.

After that, somewhere in the Arab lands, she heard that a Prophet had appeared. Curiosity drew her. She came to Madinah, she found the Prophet ﷺ, and she entered Islam. And that, she told the mother of the believers, was the meaning of her poem. The day of the red scarf was the wonder that lifted her out of a people who knew nothing of their Lord and set her down, in the end, among the believers.

Pause over what had to go right, or wrong, for her to arrive there. A scarf, a bird, a beating, a shame, a release, a rumor of a Prophet, a journey, and faith. You have no idea what stories are walking through your mosque. And if her account had stopped at her belief, that alone would have been everything: to belong to the ummah of Muhammad ﷺ, to have her salvation secured, to be counted among the companions, the most honored generation that ever lived. That, by itself, is enough.

The corner of the mosque that was hers

She did not just visit the mosque. She lived in it. She had a kind of small leather tent or hut pitched there, the sort of durable shelter the Arabs used for the long term rather than a passing journey. So when you imagine the Prophet's mosque, place her in it: a freed African woman with her little hut in the corner, and when the companions finished their prayers and the building

emptied out, she would move through it, sweeping it clean and perfuming the air.

This is the whole picture of the community the Prophet ﷺ was raising. A new home and a new life for people the world had thrown away, and at the heart of it a woman with no name worth recording to anyone but Allah, going quietly around the most honored space on the earth, making it beautiful for the worshippers who would come the next day, never asking to be seen.

He noticed she was gone

Then one day the Prophet ﷺ came out and she was not there. He noticed. He asked where she was. In a mosque full of people, in a city full of affairs, he registered the absence of the woman who swept the floor and he asked after her, the way you only ask after someone whose presence you valued.

They told him she had died. It had been night, they said. They had not wanted to wake him over it. Some of the women had come, they had washed her and shrouded her, they had prayed the funeral prayer over her, and they had buried her, all without disturbing him. The implication beneath their words is hard to miss, and the Prophet ﷺ named it: it seemed they had belittled her affair. Had this been a woman of rank, there would have been an announcement, people would have gathered, the whole community would have come. But it was only the woman who cleaned the mosque, one of the freed slave women, and they did not understand how much she meant to him or how high her standing truly was.

He did not let it pass. He asked them why they had not told him. He said, in essence, could you not have come and let me know

what happened? And then he said, take me to her grave. They led him to the place where they had buried her, and he stood and prayed over her himself, a second funeral prayer, for the woman they had thought too small to wake him for. And he said that these graves are full of darkness for the ones who lie in them, and that Allah fills them with light by his prayer over their occupants. It is as if he were saying: never again think anyone is insignificant. The difference between my standing over you and my not standing over you may be the difference between darkness and light. Do not belittle her. Do not belittle any of them.

There is a longer version of this, weaker in its chain, that we cannot confirm but that carries the same fragrance. In it the Prophet ﷺ saw a fresh grave, and asked whose it was, and they said the one who used to live in the mosque and care for it, and he lined up the companions and prayed over her. And it is said he spoke to her in the grave, asking which deed she had found most helpful to her there, and that Allah let her hear, and that she answered: it was the cleaning of the mosque. We hold that report lightly because of the weakness in it. But the certain part, recorded in the rigorous collections, is enough: he missed her, he was grieved, he prayed over her himself, and he taught his community that her rank was higher than any of them had guessed.

What Umm Mahjan's life asks of our faith

People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one another. In God's eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware.

QUR'AN 49:13

It is easy to read her story and take from it only a lesson in manners, that we should be kinder to the overlooked and tidier in the mosque. That is true, and it is not nearly enough. Her life is asking something of our faith.

Begin with what she did, because it is so small that you can do it today. She swept a floor for the sake of Allah. No one was watching when the mosque emptied out. No one wrote her name beside the deed. There was no reward in it that any person could give her, no thanks, no notice, nothing. And it was, in all likelihood, the deed that mattered most when she lay in her grave. This is the meaning of ikhlas, sincerity: to do a thing for Allah alone, content that He has seen it, when not one human being ever will. Ask yourself how much of what you do is shaped, even slightly, by who might be watching. Then find one good deed this week that no one will know about, and do it only for Him. Pick up the harmful thing in the path. Tidy the place where people pray. Give the gift that has no return address. That is her path, and it is still open.

See, too, what her story does to your idea of nobility. The verse is plain: the most honored of you in the sight of Allah are the ones most mindful of Him. Not the ones with names, or wealth, or lineage, or a place at the front of the gathering. This took the companions time to truly absorb; the old tribalism and elitism did not die in a day, and it was hard for proud people to grasp that the African slave woman sweeping the floor was, in Allah's measure, more noble than they were. It is no easier for us. We rank one another constantly, by income and title and how useful a person seems to be. Her life asks you to look at the people your eyes slide past, the cleaner, the quiet one in the back, the person no one greets, and to remember that Allah may have placed among them someone closer to Him than you will ever be.

And let her story turn your heart toward trust in Allah. Look at how He dealt with her. The world called her a thief and beat the truth out of her, and Allah sent a bird back through the sky to clear her name. The world thought her too small to disturb the Prophet ﷺ over, and Allah moved His Messenger to walk to her grave and fill it with light. Everything that was done to her in cruelty, Allah answered in honor. This is the promise that should steady you when you are wronged and no one believes you, when your good is done in the dark and no one sees: Allah sees. Allah answers. What the world overlooks in you, He records, and what looks from the outside like a forgotten life may be, in His sight, a life of the highest rank.

So take one thing from this woman into your ordinary days. Trust that Allah notices what people do not. Do a small good purely for Him and let it stay hidden. And look again at the people you have been trained to overlook, because the One who created you from a single soul does not measure them the way you do. May Allah be pleased with Umm Mahjan, and have mercy on her, and fill our graves with the light He gave to hers, and gather us among those whose smallest deeds He counted as great.

This chapter follows the account of Umm Mahjan (RA), the woman who cleaned the Prophet's mosque, in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (49:13). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported and authentic has been followed, and the weaker report noted as such.

Bishr ibn al-Baraa

The One Who Would Not Spit It Out

There is a kind of love that shows itself in a single instant, when there is no time to think and no chance to take the choice back. Bishr ibn al-Baraa (may Allah be pleased with him) lived such an instant. A piece of meat was in his mouth. Something about it felt wrong. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was beside him, and Bishr understood, in the time it takes to swallow, that to spit the food out in front of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ would be to fall short of the reverence he owed him. So he swallowed. He chose courtesy toward the Prophet ﷺ over the saving of his own life, and that single swallow carried him into the ranks of the martyrs.

But to understand that moment, you have to begin with his father, and with a pledge taken in the dark of night outside Makkah.

The son of the first to pledge

Bishr was the eldest son of al-Baraa ibn Ma'rur (may Allah be pleased with him), and his father was no ordinary man among the Ansar. When the people of Yathrib came to give their pledge to the Prophet ﷺ, al-Baraa ibn Ma'rur was the first to extend his hand. Bishr was there. He went with his father to take that pledge, a young man standing beside the man who began it all for the city that would become Madinah.

So when the Prophet ﷺ later came to Banu Salima, the tribe of al-Baraa, the question of leadership was alive among them. Their

old leader was gone, and they were looking for someone to fill the place. The Prophet ﷺ asked them plainly, "Who is your leader, O Banu Salima?" They answered that it was al-Jadd ibn Qays, "though there is some stinginess in him." The Prophet ﷺ did not let that pass. "And what disease is worse than stinginess?" he said. Then he pointed to the young, fair-skinned, curly-haired boy among them and said, "Rather, your leader is Bishr ibn al-Baraa."

Bishr was young. He did not actually take up the running of the tribe's affairs. But notice what the Prophet ﷺ was doing. He was lifting this boy up, placing him in a station of honour, in front of everyone, because he knew who his father was, he knew what his father had done, he knew what his father had intended, and, in a way the others could not yet see, he knew what lay ahead for Bishr. A man can be raised in the sight of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ long before the world catches up to it.

Bishr was old enough to receive a guest into his home. When the Prophet ﷺ joined the Muhajirun and the Ansar in bonds of brotherhood, Bishr was paired with a man named Waqid ibn Abdullah, one of the earliest Muslims of Makkah, a man who had accepted Islam even before the believers gathered in the house of al-Arqam. Waqid lived in Bishr's house. He was, in every sense that mattered, his brother. Bishr himself was married to a woman named Qubaysah bint Sayfi, and they had a daughter, Aaliyah. His wife and his daughter accepted Islam as well, so his whole household was a household of faith.

The argument at the gathering of the tribes

There was a real and bitter enmity between Bishr and the Jewish tribes of Madinah, Banu Qaynuqa, Banu Nadir, and Banu

Qurayza. It was not the quiet hostility of the hypocrites that other companions had to endure. It was open, recurring, face to face.

It comes out clearly in one striking scene. Bishr ibn al-Baraa, together with Mu'adh ibn Jabal (may Allah be pleased with him) and a small group of companions, went to the Jewish tribes and confronted them with their own words. For years, they reminded them, you used to pray against us, the Aws and the Khazraj. You called us idol worshippers who understood nothing of faith. You told us, over and over, that a prophet was coming, that he would be sent to you, and that when he came it would be the end of us. You said it as a threat. And now that the prophet has actually arrived, you are the first to reject him. Instead of praying for him, you plot against him. Instead of standing with him, you show enmity. How does this make any sense?

Among the men they were addressing was Sallam ibn Mishkam, a head of Banu Nadir and a cousin of Huyayy ibn Akhtab. He was a religious man, one of those who had been waiting for a prophet, and yet he rejected the Prophet ﷺ the moment he came, claiming this could not be the one, that the book he brought was foreign to them, that they knew nothing of him. There were three kinds of people among those tribes. There were those like Abdullah ibn Sallam (may Allah be pleased with him) who recognised the truth and embraced it. There were those who admitted they knew it was him but could not bear that he came from outside their bloodline, the same blind pride that had ruined the leaders of Makkah. And there were those who simply dug in and swore to oppose him with every fibre of their being.

This is the conversation that lies behind a verse many of us have recited without knowing its weight. Allah says:

Low indeed is the price for which they have sold their souls by denying the God-sent truth, out of envy that God should send His bounty to any of His servants He pleases. The disbelievers have ended up with wrath upon wrath, and a humiliating torment awaits them.

QUR'AN 2:90

The verse just before it describes how these tribes had once prayed for victory over the disbelievers, meaning the Aws and the Khazraj in their days of idolatry, mocking them as people with no faith and promising that the coming prophet would settle the matter. Then, when the very thing they recognised finally came to them, they refused to believe in it. They became, in the end, exactly what they had accused others of being. That was the whole point Bishr and Mu'adh had pressed: you told us this prophet would come and finish us, and now he is here, and you find yourselves on the wrong side of the very promise you used to hold over our heads.

The slumber that came down at Uhud

Bishr was not a child who watched from a distance. He was a skilled archer, and the scholars record that the Prophet ﷺ stationed him among the archers at Badr, where the archers gave the believers a decisive advantage. And he was at Uhud, in the thick of it, when the day turned chaotic and frightening.

In the middle of that battle, when the believers were exhausted and afraid and pressed from every side, Allah sent something down upon them. Allah describes it:

After sorrow, He caused calm to descend upon you, a sleep that overtook some of you.

QUR'AN 3:154

This was not ordinary fatigue. It was a tranquility from the heavens, a cooling peace that settled over the believers until they were so calm it looked as though sleep was overtaking them, men slouching behind their shields in the midst of a battlefield, utterly at rest. Bishr ibn al-Baraa was holding his sword when it came over him. The peace was so complete that his grip loosened and the sword slipped from his hand. Then he gathered himself, picked it up again, took a firm hold, and went back to fighting.

Think about what that means. The fighting is desperate, the enemy is coming from every direction, and Allah pours down upon His believers a stillness so deep it is almost like sleep, and they rise from it refreshed and steady. This is the calm Allah grants the believer in the hardest moments, a clarity in the middle of terror that does not come from the self but descends from above. Bishr was one of the men this verse was describing. He felt the mercy of Allah in his own hands, in the very weight of the sword he almost let go.

The omen they turned against themselves

There is another thread that runs through Bishr's life, and it belongs to his brother Waqid. Waqid ibn Abdullah went out on one of the early expeditions and took part in the killing of a man named Amr ibn al-Hadrami, one of the figures most aggressive toward the Prophet ﷺ. The killing was attributed mainly to Waqid.

The tribes that hated the Prophet ﷺ seized on the names involved and twisted them into a superstition. Amr, they said, sounds like the war has been set going. Al-Hadrami sounds like the war is now present. And Waqid means the one who lights the torch, so they declared the torch of war had been lit, and they

took it as an omen that they would overcome the Prophet ﷺ and triumph against him. They celebrated. They took pride in the sign they had invented.

All of it turned against them. Every one of those three tribes was eventually broken. And Waqid himself, the man they had cursed as a bad omen, lived on quietly until the time of Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him). He left no children behind. He had become Muslim early in Makkah, fought in every battle alongside the Prophet ﷺ, and is barely mentioned in the books, and yet his end was honour and the omen against him was nothing but the empty fear of people who had already chosen their own ruin.

Khaybar, and the meal that was meant for the Prophet ﷺ

Now comes the moment that places Bishr forever in the heart of the seerah.

When the three tribes were defeated and Khaybar fell, the widow of Sallam ibn Mishkam, a woman named Zaynab bint al-Harith, set out to poison the Prophet ﷺ. She asked which part of the lamb he loved most, and she was told it was the shoulder. So she took a lamb, laced it with a powerful poison, concentrating it in the shoulder, and served it to him.

The only one eating alongside the Prophet ﷺ that day was Bishr ibn al-Baraa. The Prophet ﷺ took a piece and chewed it, and Bishr took a bite at the same moment. Then the Prophet ﷺ told the companions, "Hold back your hands," and said that the meat had informed him it was poisoned. He spat his out. But for Bishr it was already too late.

Here is the detail that should stop us. When Bishr put the meat in his mouth, it felt wrong to him. Something was not right. And still

he did not spit it out. Out of adab, out of reverence for the Prophet ﷺ, he could not bring himself to spit food out in his presence. He said, in effect, that he did not wish to preserve his own life after the Prophet's, and that he assumed the Prophet ﷺ would not have eaten it if there were truly something wrong. So he swallowed the whole piece. The same reverence his father had carried for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ had passed down into the son, and in that instant it cost him his life.

The Prophet ﷺ called for the woman and asked her why she had done it. She answered that her father, her husband, and her brother had all been killed, and that she had reasoned it out: if he were a false prophet, the poison would rid the people of him, and if he were a true prophet, then he would be protected from it. The Prophet ﷺ was protected. When the companions asked whether they should kill her, he let it go. That mercy is worth pausing over, that even here, with poison in his own body, the first instinct of the Prophet ﷺ was to forgive.

As for Bishr, the poison took him cruelly. His skin began to turn green, he was paralysed from the neck down, and he passed away, a martyr killed by that meal. The histories differ on exactly how long it took, but they agree he died as a shaheed. And some of the biographers note that the woman, though the Prophet ﷺ forgave her for what was attempted against him, was eventually held to account for the life of Bishr, the penalty carried out for the killing of Bishr ibn al-Baraa.

The Prophet ﷺ himself did not die from it. That poison was made to kill instantly, yet he lived on for years after Khaybar, through the conquest of Makkah, through Tabuk, through his farewell pilgrimage. And yet, even at the very end of his blessed life, he spoke of the pain of that poison still in his body. The scholars

reconciled this beautifully: the lingering effect of the poison, never fully gone, was the means by which the Prophet ﷺ was granted the honour and rank of martyrdom as well, even though the poison did not take him the way it was meant to. The same meal that made Bishr a martyr touched the Messenger of Allah ﷺ with a share of that same honour.

A mother sending her salam through the dying

There is one more person who must be in this chapter, and she carries its closing weight. Umm Bishr, his mother, was devastated by his death. You might think she would be consoled at once. Her husband had been the first to pledge to the Prophet ﷺ. Her son had died a martyr beside the Prophet ﷺ, the only one to die that way in that setting, with all the honour that came with it. And still, she was a mother who had lost her boy, and the grief was real.

So she came to the Prophet ﷺ with a question that only a grieving mother would think to ask. "Do the dead come to know one another? Do they recognise each other?" The Prophet ﷺ answered her, "May your hands be covered in dust," a gentle Arab admonishment, and then he told her, yes, of course they do. He said that the good soul is placed in the body of a green bird in Paradise, and that these birds gather and come to know one another on the branches of the trees of the Garden. The martyrs of one generation meet the martyrs of another. They reunite. They speak with one another. They recognise each other.

Hold on to that picture, because it changes how grief feels. The believers who are lost to us are not lost to each other. The way those birds fly together and come to know one another in the Garden is the way the souls reunite and speak there, across generations, the righteous of long ago meeting the righteous of now.

And what did Umm Bishr do with that knowledge? From then on, whenever anyone of her tribe of Banu Salima was about to die, she would go to them at their deathbed and say, "When you die, when you meet my son, convey my salam to him." She would hear that someone was nearing the end, and she would go, and she would entrust them with her greeting. If you meet my son among the people of Paradise, give him my salam. She did this until she herself passed away, and then the people came to her in turn, asking her to carry their salam onward, just as she had carried theirs.

Two people whose names are rarely spoken. A son who would not spit out a piece of meat in front of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and a mother who spent her remaining years sending greetings ahead of her into the next world. Look at the standing they hold with the Prophet ﷺ. Look at what their quiet lives became.

What Bishr's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read Bishr's story as a tragedy, a young man poisoned by mistake, and to feel sorrow and move on. But his life is not a sad accident. It is a question put directly to our own iman.

Start with the swallow itself. Bishr tasted that something was wrong and still would not spit the food out, because of the honour he gave the Prophet ﷺ. We do not face that exact choice. But every day we face smaller versions of it: a moment when reverence for what Allah and His Messenger ﷺ love would cost us a little comfort, a little face, a little of what we want, and we get to decide whether we hold to that reverence or quietly protect ourselves. Bishr's instinct, formed long before that day, was to put the honour of the Prophet ﷺ above his own safety. That instinct is built in ordinary moments, in how seriously we take the Sunnah when no emergency is forcing our hand. Ask

whether your love for the Prophet ﷺ is the kind that would still hold when it is inconvenient, because that is the only kind that holds when it matters.

Then look at the sword that slipped from his hand at Uhud. In the worst moment, when fear should have ruled him, Allah sent down a calm from the heavens, and Bishr fought on with a stillness that was not his own. That calm is not reserved for the battlefield. It is the sakina Allah still sends to the heart that turns to Him in fear, in grief, in the hospital room, in the long night of worry. The lesson is not that the believer feels no fear. It is that the believer is not left alone in it. When dread comes for you, your task is to keep your grip on what you know of Allah, and to trust that He sends His peace down upon those who do, just as surely as He did upon the men at Uhud.

And consider how little the world recorded of Bishr and his mother, and how much Allah did. He was named a leader as a boy and never ran a tribe. He left a daughter and a young widow and a name most people have never heard. His mother spent her last years whispering salam to the dying. None of it made them famous. All of it made them beloved to Allah and His Messenger ﷺ. This is the quiet promise that should reorder how we measure our own lives. What you do for Allah in obscurity, He does not lose. The reverence, the patience, the small steadfast acts that no one claps for, He is recording every one of them, and He gathers their doers in the company of the martyrs.

So take something from Bishr into today. Honour one Sunnah this week that costs you a little something, and do it for the love of the Prophet ﷺ, not for anyone watching. When the next fear comes, instead of letting it own you, turn to Allah and ask Him for the calm He sent down at Uhud, and trust that it will come. And

like Umm Bishr, let your hope in the meeting with the righteous shape how you live now, so that the believers you love, the ones gone ahead and the ones still beside you, are people you would be glad to meet again on the branches of the trees of the Garden. May Allah be pleased with Bishr ibn al-Baraa and his father and his mother, join us with them in the body of green birds among the martyrs, and let us meet one another in the highest Firdaws.

This chapter follows the account of Bishr ibn al-Baraa (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2:90, 3:154). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Al-Baraa ibn Ma'roor

The First Hand in the Prophet's Hand

There are companions whose names fill whole books, and there are companions who pass through the histories so quickly that you could miss them in a single breath. Al-Baraa ibn Ma'roor (may Allah be pleased with him) belongs to the second kind, and yet, when you slow down and look at the little that survives of him, you find a man so unusual that even the scholars who study him reach for a rare and beautiful description. They call him a jurist of the soul.

He did not live long enough in Islam to leave behind chains of narration or a famous saying repeated in every gathering. He died before the religion took its full shape, before most of the laws we know were even revealed. And still, in the brief season he was given, this elderly man from Madinah did two things that the books record as his great virtues, and the strange truth is that both of them were mistakes. Well-intentioned mistakes, made by a heart that wanted Allah so badly that it ran ahead of the guidance. That is who he was. A man whose errors were so sincere that they became honors.

A chief of Banu Salima

To understand him, you have to go back to the hardest years of the Prophet's life, when the message of Islam had been carried through the streets of Makkah for years and almost no one would

accept it. In those years the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would go out during the season of Hajj and present himself to the tribes who came from every direction, calling them, one by one, to the worship of the one God. Most turned him away.

Then, from the city that would one day be called Madinah, but was then still known as Yathrib, six young men met him. They listened, and they believed, and they carried the message home with them. The next year a small group came to pledge themselves to him. The year after that, a much larger group came, more than seventy people, to take the second pledge at Aqaba and to open the door for the Prophet ﷺ to come and live among them. These were the pledges that changed everything. They were the moment a persecuted man in Makkah became a man with a home and a people waiting for him.

In both of those pledges, the very first person to step forward, to walk up out of the crowd and place his hand into the hand of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, was al-Baraa ibn Ma'roor. He was the chosen representative of Banu Salima, a great and famous tribe of the Ansar. He was an old man, the eldest of them and the most respected, and so it fell to him by right of honor to go first. Picture it twice over: a night in the valley near Makkah, a small assembly of people stepping into a covenant that could cost them their lives, and at the head of them this elderly chief, putting his aged hand into the hand of the Prophet ﷺ before anyone else dared to move.

He was a man of great virtue, the histories say, a man of extreme piety. There was a particular quality in him that the scholars single out. He was the kind of person who does good without ever being prompted to do it, and who is unusually careful, almost severe, with himself when it comes to sin. This is what

earns him that rare title: a jurist of the soul. Not a guru, not someone given to strange practices, but a man so devoted to purifying his own heart, so honest in examining himself, that Allah gave him an inner sight, an ability to diagnose the realities of his own soul and lean, almost by instinct, toward what was true.

There is a saying of the Prophet ﷺ that the scholars place beside men like him: that people are like buried treasure, and the best of them in the days of ignorance are the best of them in Islam, when they are given understanding. The meaning is gentle and exacting at once. A person who was known for charity, for honesty, for good character before Islam does not throw those things away when he believes. He refines them. He carries them into his faith and makes them more beautiful than they were. Al-Baraa was such a man. Everything recorded about him is good. He simply did not live long enough for the good to become a legend.

A whole household at the door

When al-Baraa came to the Prophet ﷺ, he did not come alone. He brought his family with him, and there is something moving in the picture of it.

He brought his mother, a very elderly woman, and she took her testimony of faith and gave her pledge to the Prophet ﷺ in her old age. He brought his wife Khalida bint Anas, known by an affectionate name, herself a noble companion with her own standing. He brought another wife and several children, and they too entered Islam. One of those children, his eldest son Bishr ibn al-Baraa, he brought forward to give the pledge alongside him.

This is the first thing to sit with. Here is the first man from Madinah to pledge his hand to the Prophet ﷺ, and on the same

threshold stand his aged mother, his wives, and his sons, all crossing into the new faith together. A man who finds the truth and cannot imagine entering it by himself, who gathers everyone he loves and brings them with him. Through that household, generations of scholars of the religion would later come. But the patriarch who opened the door for all of them would not live to see most of what grew from it.

The mistake of facing the Kaaba

Now comes the first of his two beautiful mistakes, and there may be no other companion who carries this particular distinction.

When al-Baraa accepted Islam, he began to pray. And from the very start, he turned his body toward the Kaaba in Makkah. There is only one problem with that. At that time, the Prophet ﷺ and the believers were not praying toward the Kaaba. They were praying toward Jerusalem. The command to change the direction of prayer to Makkah would not come down for another sixteen or seventeen months, well after the Prophet ﷺ had settled in Madinah.

So how did al-Baraa come to do this? He had never even met the Prophet ﷺ at this point. He had no instruction, no example to follow. He simply knew, in the way that pure souls seem to know, that Makkah held the house that the Prophet Ibrahim had built for the worship of the one God, and something in him recoiled at the thought of putting his back to it. He said, in effect: I cannot bring myself to turn my back on the Sacred House. And so, alone among all the believers, he prayed toward it.

His companions on the road were troubled by this. As they traveled together toward Makkah, every time the prayer came, al-Baraa faced the Kaaba while all of them faced Jerusalem, as they

had heard their Prophet ﷺ did. They argued with him. They told him he was wrong, that they would not abandon the direction the Messenger of Allah ﷺ had taught. They grew frustrated. He would not yield.

And here is the part that reveals the man. He did not insist out of arrogance. As they neared Makkah he turned to one of them and said, with real humility, "O son of my brother, I have been doing something on this journey and I do not know whether it is right. I find in my soul that this House was set up for the worship of Allah, and that it should be our direction. But I do not know if what I am doing is correct. So let us go to the Prophet ﷺ and ask him." He had followed the leaning of his heart, but he held that leaning open to correction. He was willing to be told he was wrong by the one person who had the right to tell him.

They did not even know what the Prophet ﷺ looked like. That is how early this all was. They had to ask their way to him, searching until they were directed to al-Abbas, the Prophet's uncle, a merchant whose face the people of Madinah knew from his trading journeys. Al-Abbas was sitting in the sacred precinct, and beside him sat the Prophet ﷺ. They gave their greeting and sat down. The Prophet ﷺ turned to his uncle and asked him to introduce these two men. Al-Abbas said, "This is the leader of his people," meaning al-Baraa, "and this is Ka'b ibn Malik."

Then al-Baraa, in his very first conversation with the Prophet ﷺ, laid his uncertainty plainly before him. He said, in effect: I want you to know that I have been praying toward the Sacred House rather than toward Jerusalem. Tell me, was I wrong? And the Prophet ﷺ answered him with a tenderness that the histories preserved: "You had been upon a valid direction, if only you had been patient with it."

You had been upon something true. If only you had waited. So al-Baraa returned to praying toward Jerusalem, as the believers did, until the day Allah Himself sent down the command to turn toward Makkah.

The beauty of this only deepens when you learn the story behind that command. When the direction of prayer was finally changed, the believers were seized by a worry: what about all those who had died praying toward Jerusalem, who never lived to face Makkah? Had their prayers been wasted? It was into that anxiety that Allah sent down His reassurance:

We have made you [believers] into a just community, so that you may bear witness [to the truth] before others and so that the Messenger may bear witness [to it] before you. We only made the direction the one you used to face [Prophet] in order to distinguish those who follow the Messenger from those who turn on their heels: that test was hard, except for those God has guided. God would never let your faith go to waste [believers], for God is most compassionate and most merciful towards people.

QUR'AN 2:143

Look at how al-Baraa sits inside this verse. The other believers feared that facing Jerusalem might have been a loss. Al-Baraa was the one who had strained toward Makkah, ahead of the command, and was lovingly told to be patient. He stands at one edge of the same test, the man whose heart inclined toward the truth before the truth was revealed to him. His soul was so sound that it kept arriving early. And Allah's promise covers all of it: He would never let their faith go to waste, neither the patience of those who waited nor the longing of the one who could not.

The mistake of giving too much

The second of his beautiful mistakes came at the very end of his life, and it is the only other thing we truly have from him.

When al-Baraa lay dying, he made his will. He left one-third of everything he owned to the Prophet ﷺ, to use as he saw fit, and one-third to his family. It was the gesture of a man who loved the Messenger of Allah ﷺ with his whole heart and wanted to give him the most generous portion he could imagine. You have to feel the sentiment behind it: what a noble thing for a man to want, that a piece of his life should go on serving the Prophet ﷺ after he himself was gone.

But it was not, in the strict reckoning, an arrangement that the law would later allow. A man's wealth has rightful heirs, and there are limits to how it may be redirected away from them. So when the Prophet ﷺ came to Madinah and learned of the bequest, he returned al-Baraa's share to al-Baraa's own family, to the heirs to whom it belonged. He honored the love that had moved the old man's hand, and then he gently set the gift back where it should rightfully go.

And so the irony that the histories quietly note: the two things remembered as al-Baraa's virtues, the prayer toward the Kaaba and the bequest of his wealth, were both, technically, errors. He faced the wrong direction. He gave away more than was his to give. Yet because both came from a heart that wanted only to please Allah, and because both were corrected with mercy rather than rebuke, they are recorded not as failures but as honors. We speak his name with praise. Allah does not measure the way the ledgers of men measure. He weighs the intention beneath the act.

He never saw the Prophet arrive

Here is the sorrow at the center of his story, the reason you have likely never heard his name.

After both pledges, after bringing his household into Islam, after being one of the very reasons the religion took root in Madinah, al-Baraa went home. And he died in the month of Safar, one month before the Prophet ﷺ made his migration to Madinah. One month.

Sit with the weight of that. This man traveled to Makkah and put his hand into the hand of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ before any other Helper dared to. He helped open the very city that would shelter the Prophet ﷺ and become the home of Islam. He prepared the ground for the arrival. And then he died just weeks before that arrival came, never living to see the moment he had worked toward, never welcoming the Prophet ﷺ into the city he had helped make ready. He was, in a sense, like a man who builds a home with his own hands and dies the week before the family moves in.

But Allah does not forget the ones who labored in the dark before the dawn. When the Prophet ﷺ reached Madinah, he asked about al-Baraa, and they told him he had died. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Take me to his grave." They brought him to it, and there, at the graveside of a man he had met only briefly in this life, the Prophet ﷺ stood and made supplication for him. He said, "O Allah, forgive him, and have mercy upon him, and enter him into Paradise." And in one narration he added the words that should make every striving heart tremble with hope: "and indeed, You have already done so."

Indeed, You have already done so. A man who never saw the thing he longed for in this world had it answered for him at the

threshold of the next, by the lips of the Prophet ﷺ himself, standing over his grave.

What al-Baraa's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and take from it only a lesson about good character, to admire the sincere old chief and move on. That would be to miss what his life is actually asking of us. His story is not a portrait to hang on a wall. It is a question pressed against our own faith.

The first thing he asks of us is that we let our hearts incline toward Allah even before everything is made clear. Al-Baraa did not have the full law in front of him. He had a soul that had been polished by years of carefulness and good intention, and that soul kept reaching for the truth. This is the fruit of becoming a jurist of your own heart: not that you suddenly know every ruling, but that your instincts begin to bend, quietly and on their own, toward what pleases your Lord. We build that the way he built it, by doing good without waiting to be asked, and by being honest and unsparing with ourselves about our own sins. Examine your soul the way he examined his. Allah has a way of guiding the one who is genuinely trying to be guided.

The second thing he asks is harder, and it is this: hold your sincerity open to correction. Al-Baraa was certain in his heart, and he was wrong about the direction, and the moment he could ask the Prophet ﷺ, he asked, and the moment he was told to wait, he waited. How rare that is. Most of us, once we are sure of something, dig in. We defend our position more than we seek the truth. He shows us a faith that is passionate and humble at once, willing to act on conviction and willing, just as quickly, to be shown a better way. In your own life, in a disagreement about what is right, ask yourself which you love more: being correct, or

being corrected toward the truth. He loved the truth more than he loved himself.

And the third thing, the thing that should settle into your chest and stay there, is the mercy of how Allah receives an honest mistake. Al-Baraa faced the wrong way and gave away what was not his to give, and Allah, through His Prophet ﷺ, did not record these as sins. He recorded them as virtues, because the heart beneath them was pure. This is the God we worship. He is not waiting to catch you in your errors. He is looking at why you did the thing, at what your heart was reaching for. So do not let the fear of getting it imperfect freeze you into doing nothing. Act for His sake, sincerely, with whatever understanding you have, and correct yourself the moment you learn better. A sincere mistake in the path of Allah is closer to Him than a flawless deed done for the eyes of people.

Remember too what the Prophet ﷺ once said about every soul drawing near the Fire, that all will approach it, and then:

We shall save the devout and leave the evildoers there on their knees.

QUR'AN 19:71-72

Al-Baraa is among the devout whom Allah saves. He never saw the Prophet ﷺ enter Madinah, never narrated the famous hadith, never had his name written large across the centuries. He had only a short season, a pure intention, two well-meant mistakes, and a heart that leaned toward his Lord. And it was enough. The Prophet ﷺ stood at his grave and was told that Allah had already forgiven him and admitted him to Paradise.

So take one thing from this old chief of Banu Salima into your ordinary day. Do one good deed no one will see, the way he

prayed toward a House no one around him was facing, simply because his heart told him it was closer to Allah. And when you are shown you were wrong about something, soften, and turn, and follow the truth, the way he did the moment he heard it. That is a faith still within reach of anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with al-Baraa ibn Ma'roor, who put his hand in the Prophet's hand before anyone else and never lived to see him come, and may Allah grant us the sincerity that turns even our mistakes into things He loves, and gather us with those whom He has already promised to save.

This chapter follows the account of al-Baraa ibn Ma'roor (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2:143, 19:71-72). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Al-Baraa ibn Aazib

The One Who Watched Closely

There are companions whose greatness lies in a single, blazing moment, a charge into a hopeless battle, a word spoken in the face of a tyrant. And there are companions whose greatness is quieter, almost invisible at first, because it is spread across thousands of ordinary moments of watching. Al-Baraa ibn Aazib (may Allah be pleased with him) belonged to the second kind. He was a boy when the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ arrived in his city, too young to fight, often standing at the edge of things. But he watched. He watched the way a person watches someone he loves, missing nothing, and he carried what he saw for the rest of his long life, and then he handed it to us. Much of what we know about how the Prophet ﷺ looked, prayed, dug, fought, and slept comes through the eyes of this attentive young man.

He narrated more than three hundred hadith from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, which places him among the most frequent narrators of all the companions. Yet his own story is rarely told. It deserves to be.

A boy waiting on the road

His name comes up often in the books of hadith, sometimes given in full, sometimes shortened simply to al-Baraa. He was from the tribe of Banu Harithah of the Ansar in Madinah, then still called Yathrib. His was a household soaked in faith. His father,

Aazib, was a companion, an old man when he embraced Islam, who fades into the background after a single narration. His mother accepted Islam too. One of his uncles was martyred at the battle of Yamamah, and another, Abu Burdah, was among the trusted men close to the Prophet ﷺ. Al-Baraa grew up inside this, surrounded on every side by people who had given their hearts to something new.

Before the Prophet ﷺ ever reached the city, al-Baraa had already attached himself to Mus'ab ibn Umayr, the young teacher Madinah sent for, the man who introduced Islam to its people. Al-Baraa became his student. He said that by the time the Prophet ﷺ arrived, he had already memorized a large portion of the short chapters of the Qur'an, and that he later recited them to the Prophet ﷺ himself. Picture a ten-year-old boy, learning the words of revelation from a beloved teacher, waiting for the day the source of those words would finally come.

And so he waited on the road. He describes it for us, the whole anticipation of a city holding its breath. He saw his parents excited, his tribe excited, and he could not contain himself. Mus'ab had gone back to Makkah, and now everyone was straining toward the horizon. The first to arrive, al-Baraa says, was Mus'ab, the most familiar face. They surrounded him: where is the Prophet ﷺ? He answered that the Prophet was on his way, his companions right behind. Then came another, then Ammar, then Bilal (may Allah be pleased with them all), and to each one the people ran with the same question, and each gave the same answer: he is coming. Then came one with twenty men around him, because he feared no one. Then, at last, the Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr arrived.

What al-Baraa remembered most was the joy. "I swear by Allah," he said, "I never saw the people of Madinah more happy about anything than they were when the Prophet ﷺ arrived." We try to capture that morning in songs and reenactments. He was simply there, a child in the middle of the happiest day his city had ever known.

Three doors into the companionship

There is one famous narration that comes to us through al-Baraa from his father, and it is one of the great accounts of the migration, found in the most rigorous collections. It begins with something small. Abu Bakr came to al-Baraa's father in Madinah and bought a saddle from him for thirteen dirhams. Then Abu Bakr asked, "Could you have your son al-Baraa carry it to my house?" But the father answered, "No. I will not send him with the saddle until you tell me what it was like when the Prophet ﷺ came to you and said, let us go out on the journey of the hijra."

So out of that ordinary transaction, a saddle and a request, came one of the most detailed tellings of the hijra we possess. Imagine the boy sitting beside his father, listening to Abu Bakr unfold it: how they traveled through the night and the day, how Abu Bakr searched for shade for the Prophet ﷺ and found a rock, leveled the ground beneath it, spread a garment, and told him to rest. How he went looking for milk and found a young shepherd, milked a little into a small vessel, and brought it back, and how he watched the Prophet ﷺ drink until he himself was satisfied to see the Prophet satisfied. How a pursuer, Suraqah, came riding hard, and the Prophet ﷺ said, "Do not be afraid. Allah is with us," and how the horse's legs sank into the ground. The boy drank in every detail. When the story was finished, his father told him, "Now go ahead and take the saddle to the house of Abu Bakr."

So al-Baraa carried it, and walked into Abu Bakr's home, and saw something else he never forgot. There lay Aisha, still young, struck down by the fever that gripped so many newcomers to Madinah. And he saw Abu Bakr kneel beside his daughter and kiss her on the cheek and ask, gently, how she was. This was how al-Baraa met the companions: the Prophet ﷺ from afar on the road, Abu Bakr up close through the story of the hijra, and the household of faith through a father's tenderness toward his sick child.

The third door was the Prophet ﷺ himself. One day the Prophet ﷺ saw the boy and put out his hand to shake his. Al-Baraa notes that the Arabs did not used to shake hands; it surprised them. So, ever the student, he asked the Prophet ﷺ about it, and the Prophet ﷺ told him that no two Muslims meet and shake hands and praise Allah and seek His forgiveness except that they are forgiven before they part. From the very first touch, al-Baraa was learning.

The face like the full moon

Because he watched so closely, al-Baraa became one of our finest witnesses to the appearance of the Prophet ﷺ. He was once asked whether the Prophet's face was as bright as a sword, the way a fresh, shining blade catches light. He said no: his face was as bright as the full moon, and brighter still. If you have ever stood in a desert at night and seen the full moon, you understand what he was reaching for.

He told us the Prophet ﷺ was of a modest height, neither short nor tall but leaning slightly toward tall, with hair that fell to his shoulders. He remembered seeing him once in a red garment from Yemen, a kind of overcoat common to that region, and said, "I swear by Allah, I never saw anything more beautiful than the

Prophet ﷺ that day." These are not the words of a man cataloguing facts. They are the words of a man in awe.

But al-Baraa understood that the Prophet ﷺ was known not only by how he looked but by how he behaved and what he asked of those around him. So he preserved for us the shape of the new society. He said the Prophet ﷺ commanded them with seven things: to visit the sick, to follow funerals, to respond to the one who sneezes, to support the weak, to aid the oppressed, to spread the greeting of peace, and to help a person fulfill their oath. Sit with that first one for a moment. Visiting the sick, simply for the sake of it, not because they are family or friends, may be among the most quietly abandoned of our communal practices. The Prophet ﷺ placed it at the head of the list. And al-Baraa added the other half: the Prophet ﷺ forbade them from silver vessels, gold rings, and fine silks, from the kind of self-adornment that crosses into excess. A whole way of living, gathered and handed down by a man who paid attention.

In the trenches and on the battlefield

Al-Baraa longed to fight beside the Prophet ﷺ, but he was turned away at Badr and Uhud for being too young, set instead to guard the women and children. He felt a particular kinship with Abdullah ibn Umar, who was turned away with him; the two boys were alike in age and in that aching desire to be of use. Yet even as a spectator he was gathering. He questioned the men who fought at Badr until he knew the details, and he could tell you that they numbered just over three hundred, the same, the veterans told him, as the companions of Talut who crossed the river with him. The Qur'an records that crossing, and the lesson the few carried over the water:

When Talut set out with his forces, he said to them, 'God will test you with a river. Anyone who drinks from it will not belong with me, but anyone who refrains from tasting it will belong with me; if he scoops up just one handful [he will be excused].' But they all drank [deep] from it, except for a few. When he crossed it with those who had kept faith, they said, 'We have no strength today against Goliath and his warriors.' But those who knew that they were going to meet their Lord said, 'How often a small force has defeated a large army with God's permission! God is with those who are steadfast.'

QUR'AN 2:249

When he was finally permitted to fight, at the Battle of the Trench, he watched the Prophet ﷺ as he had watched him on the road years before, only now he saw a different man. He saw the Prophet ﷺ digging in the trench, carrying out the dirt himself until it covered his chest and his whole body, the dust clinging to his hair. "What a leader," al-Baraa seems to be saying, "in the trenches like everyone else." And he saw the Prophet ﷺ lift the morale of the diggers, chanting the lines of the poet Abdullah ibn Rawahah: O Allah, had it not been for You we would not have been guided, nor given charity, nor prayed; so send down tranquility upon us and make our feet firm when we meet the enemy. The Prophet ﷺ would raise his voice at the last line, pulling the companions into the song, readying them for what was coming. And then, al-Baraa noticed, when the Prophet ﷺ went back to his own digging, alone, the first line stayed on his tongue: O Allah, if it were not for You, we would never have been guided.

They were facing what looked like annihilation, and they dug, and they sang. There is something in that scene that speaks across

the centuries to every people who have ever held their ground and refused to despair.

He watched the Prophet ﷺ at Hudaybiyah too, when a well ran dry and the Prophet ﷺ made wudu from the last of its water, gargled, and spat it back, and the water surged up until it was enough for the people and their animals. And he watched him at Hunayn, after the great victory at Makkah, when the army was ambushed and most fled. Al-Baraa was asked, "Were you among those who left the Prophet's side that day?" He swore by Allah that he was not. He stayed. He saw the Prophet ﷺ on his white mule, never turning his back, calling out, "I am the Prophet, this is no lie; I am the son of Abd al-Muttalib." And he said the bravest among them that day was the one who could merely keep pace with the Prophet ﷺ as he pressed forward. When the fighting grew fiercest, al-Baraa swore, the Prophet ﷺ dismounted and advanced on foot, and the sight of it drew the fleeing men back to him.

The narrator of the grave

Of all al-Baraa's narrations, one stands above the rest. It is the long hadith of the punishment and the reward of the grave. He describes following the Prophet ﷺ to a burial, how the Prophet ﷺ sat at the side of the grave and the companions sat around him so still it was as if birds were perched on their heads. And then the Prophet ﷺ told them, three times, to seek refuge in Allah from the punishment of the grave, and unfolded what happens when a soul leaves the body: the angels who come, the questions they ask, "Who is your Lord? Who is your Prophet? What is your religion?", and the long account of the reward or the torment that follows, until a caller calls out from the heavens. Whole works on the subject of death and what lies beyond it lean

on this single narration from al-Baraa. The boy who once watched the Prophet ﷺ arrive in joy became the man through whom we learned what awaits us all.

He preserved so much more besides: the dua for sleep that the Prophet ﷺ taught him personally, and which shows his precision. The Prophet ﷺ said, "If you say these words and die that night, you die upon the natural faith." Al-Baraa repeated them back: "I believe in Your Book which You revealed and Your Messenger whom You sent." And the Prophet ﷺ placed his hand on al-Baraa's chest and corrected one word: say "Your Prophet whom You sent." A small change, but the Prophet ﷺ wanted it said exactly. Al-Baraa carried it exactly. He also preserved the prayers of travel, the virtues of Madinah and of the Ansar, the love of the Prophet ﷺ for Hasan and Husayn, and the fine details of how the Prophet ﷺ prayed, where he placed his head in prostration, how the rows were to be straightened lest hearts fall out of sync, how the companions would not move until the Prophet's face touched the ground.

A man who corrected the record

Al-Baraa was brave, and he was honest, and he did not like to see the religion bent to excuse cowardice or stinginess. People once used a verse to justify holding back their wealth, reading "do not contribute to your destruction" as a warning against spending in Allah's cause. Al-Baraa stood and set them straight: the destruction meant here is the spiritual ruin of refusing to go forth for Allah, not the loss that comes from giving. He read the verse rightly, as Allah revealed it:

Spend in God's cause: do not contribute to your destruction with your own hands, but do good, for God

If a companion of the Prophet ﷺ had to guard the meaning of the Qur'an in his own day, we should be all the more careful in ours.

He went on fighting long after the Prophet ﷺ passed. He fought beside Ali in his battles, and against the Khawarij, and in the great campaigns against the Persian empire. At the battle of Tustar, victory came at dawn, and the fighting was so fierce that the time of Fajr slipped past, and the companions prayed it only after sunrise. Years later al-Baraa would weep at the memory, not because he had slept in or wasted the night, but because in the very thick of battle a single prayer had come late. He would say, in effect, "How can you even speak to me about the prayer we missed that day?" Let that sit beside the next time any of us delays a prayer for far less.

He lived into his eighties, teaching the sunnah to whoever would learn, including his own children. He would say, "Come, let me teach you the way of the Prophet ﷺ." Near the end, a younger man met him and said, "Glad tidings to you. You accompanied the Prophet ﷺ, and you gave the pledge under the tree." Al-Baraa, who had outlived almost everyone, began to weep. "O son of my brother," he said, "you do not know what we did after he passed away." It was not over for him. The pledge was not a memory to rest on; it was a debt to keep paying until the grave. And he kept paying it, clinging to righteousness, until he died far from Madinah, in Iraq.

What al-Baraa's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to admire al-Baraa as a remarkable witness and leave it there. But his life is not a museum of details about the

Prophet ﷺ. It is a question put to our own iman, and the question is this: are you watching, and will you carry what you see?

He teaches us, first, the worship that is paying attention. Al-Baraa loved the Prophet ﷺ so completely that he could not stop looking, could not let a handshake or a chant or the angle of a prostration pass unnoticed. That attentiveness was not idle. It was love turned into a kind of devotion, and through it Allah preserved a vast inheritance for this ummah. In an age that trains us to scroll past everything, to half-see and quickly forget, al-Baraa asks whether we look at the deen the way he looked at the Prophet ﷺ: closely, hungrily, as people who do not want to miss a thing because they love the One who gave it. You can begin today. Learn one sunnah the way he learned the sleeping dua, precisely, and then do it tonight, for Allah, because it is the way of His Messenger.

He teaches us that there is no small part in the service of Allah. As a boy he was turned away from Badr and set to guard the women and children, and he did not sulk that his role was less glorious. He served where he was placed, and he questioned and remembered and learned, until the boy at the edge of the battle became the man at the center of the books. Maybe your role right now feels minor: a parent, a student, the one who sets up chairs at the masjid, the one nobody sees. Al-Baraa's life says that Allah does not measure as people measure. Do your small thing fully, for His sake, and trust that He is recording it, even when no one notices.

And he teaches us to take the matter of Allah seriously to the very end. He wept for a single delayed prayer in the chaos of war. He wept when reminded of the tree pledge, because honor given was a trust still owed. He refused to twist a verse to make

obedience cheaper. His was not a faith that coasted on past credentials; it was a faith that feared falling short of Allah right up to the last breath. Ask yourself, honestly, what you have grown casual about, which prayer, which command, which trust, and let al-Baraa's tears make you take it seriously again, not out of fear of people, but out of love and awe of your Lord.

He met the Prophet ﷺ on a road full of joy and spent his whole life looking, and what he saw he gave to us, so that we who never saw the Prophet ﷺ could still, in a sense, watch him through al-Baraa's eyes. May Allah be pleased with al-Baraa ibn Aazib, make us as attentive to His religion as he was, as faithful in the small and unseen as he was, and gather us in the company of the one who watched the Beloved ﷺ so closely.

This chapter follows the account of al-Baraa ibn Aazib (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2:249, 2:195). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Umayr ibn Sa'd

The One of a Kind

There is a kind of believer who never asks for the front of the room. He is simply there, every time, before anyone arrives, in the first row of the prayer, in the first row of the battle, and he goes home without a word. He builds no following. He tells no stories about himself. And then one day, decades later, the most powerful man in the Muslim world looks at him and cannot find anyone to compare him to.

That man was Umayr ibn Sa'd (may Allah be pleased with him), and the title given to him, in the end, was not earned by a single dramatic deed. It was earned by a lifetime of being the same person in public and in private, in poverty and in power, when seen and when unseen. Umar gave him a word that the Arabs reserved for something woven so finely it had no equal: one of a kind. A garment with no peer. A man with no match.

A boy raised in another man's house

Umayr's life rhymes, almost line for line, with the lives of those young men of the Ansar who met the Prophet ﷺ as children and grew up in his shade. Like them, Umayr was orphaned young. His father, it appears, was no obscure man: the histories suggest he was himself a companion, one of the veterans of Badr, the very best of that generation, who died not long after that battle and

then faded quietly from the record. The son would carry forward the thing the father had: faith held without fanfare.

His mother remarried, and the man she married was named Julas ibn Suwayd. To understand what comes later, you have to understand Julas first. He was a senior figure among the people of Madinah, wealthy, influential, counted among the intelligent and the established. And to the orphan placed in his care, he was good. The narrations are careful to say it plainly: Julas raised Umayr with love, and Umayr loved him back. In an age when the Qur'an was still exposing how cruelly orphans were exploited, here was an orphan treated like a true son. That kindness was real, and Umayr never pretended otherwise.

Umayr was about ten years old when the Prophet ﷺ came to Madinah, the same tender age at which Zayd and others had first attached themselves to him. The boy embraced Islam, and his attachment took a particular shape. He was the child of the first row. His greatest bond with the Prophet ﷺ was not conversation, not battle stories, not any famous exchange. It was that he was always there, in the front line of the prayer, in the masjid, with or without the man who had raised him, present so consistently that his mother took quiet joy in it and the biographers wrote it down.

There is a hadith about the seven whom Allah will shade beneath His Throne on a day when there is no shade but His, and one of those seven is the young person who grows up attached to the masjid. Some of the scholars of hadith, when they explain that category, reach for Umayr ibn Sa'd as an example of exactly what it means. A boy who, before he understood politics or leadership or anything the world chases, understood the floor of the masjid and the front of the row.

The word that could not be unheard

Then came the test, and it arrived through the one door Umayr could least afford to have opened: the home of the man he loved.

The Prophet ﷺ called the Muslims to the expedition of Tabuk, the hardest of all the campaigns, undertaken in fierce heat against a distant and powerful enemy. The whole community was being weighed. Surah at-Tawbah was coming down upon them, the most decisive scripture ever revealed about the hypocrites, recording their excuses one by one, their false oaths, their love of comfort, every device they used to stay behind. This was the last straw, the final exposure.

Umayr was too young to fight, so he stood in the masjid and watched. He watched the believers come forward and pour out everything they had. He watched men bring gold by the hundreds of coins, watched the Prophet ﷺ praise and pray for those who gave, watched a man try to sell his very bed to find the means to march out. While the hypocrites turned every excuse over in their hands, these others were turning over every stone to be near the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in his hour of difficulty. The boy absorbed all of it.

Then he went home. And in the sincerity of a young heart that had just seen what real faith looks like, he said to Julas, in effect: why not you? Why not go to the masjid and come forward the way these people are coming forward, while the hypocrites hold back?

Julas answered with a sentence that split the boy's world. He said that if Muhammad ﷺ was telling the truth, then they were worse than donkeys. It was a statement of disbelief, spoken plainly. In a single careless breath the kind father revealed himself to be among the very people the new surah was

exposing, a man who had drifted into Islam to go with the flow, who had played both sides waiting to see who would win, and who did not in his heart believe a word of it.

Now Umayr stood in an agony that few of us are ever asked to carry. He turned to the man who had raised him and said something both tender and terrible. By Allah, he said, there is no one on the face of the earth, after the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, more beloved to me than you. But you have just said words that trap me. If I repeat them, I expose you. If I bury them, I betray my religion, because then the Messenger of Allah ﷺ has a hypocrite at his side and I am the one who chose to hide it.

Read that slowly, because it is the hinge of his entire life. A boy weighed the man he loved most in the world against his duty to Allah and His Messenger, and he did not flinch from the harder side of the scale. He went to the Prophet ﷺ and told him what he had heard.

The verse that settled it

The Prophet ﷺ summoned Julas. And Julas did exactly what such men do: he denied everything. He never said it. The boy made it up. You know how these young ones forget and invent. It was now one word against another, and the Prophet ﷺ would not punish a man on the word of a child alone. So he stayed silent.

Umayr, for his part, did the only thing left to him. He wept, and he begged Allah to make the truth plain. He had told the truth and been called a liar, and there was no court left to him but his Lord.

His Lord answered. The revelation came down, and it is preserved in the seventy-fourth verse of Surah at-Tawbah:

They swear by God that they did not, but they certainly did speak words of defiance and became defiant after having submitted; they tried to do something, though they did not achieve it, being spiteful was their only response to God and His Messenger enriching them out of His bounty. They would be better off turning back [to God]: if they turn away, God will punish them in this world and the Hereafter, and there will be no one on earth to protect or help them.

QUR'AN 9:74

The Prophet ﷺ turned to the boy and told him that his ears had been truthful in what they heard, and that his Lord had confirmed what he had said. Heaven itself had taken the side of the child who chose his religion over his love.

And then notice the mercy folded into the verse. It does not slam the door. It says they would be better off turning back. The story of Julas has an ending almost no one expects: he repented. He came back to Allah, sincerely, and afterward he used to weep and say, may Allah reward Umayr, for he saved me from the Fire. Had the boy not exposed me, he would say, I would have died upon that disbelief and my neck would have been delivered to Hell. The very act that felt like betrayal was, in truth, the rescue of the man Umayr loved.

There is a saying carried down about Umayr, and it is worth keeping: whoever knows Allah in their youth will not sell their religion in their old age. The boy who chose the truth at the cost of his heart had built something inside himself that would never be for sale. We are about to watch him refuse to sell it when the price offered is an entire province.

A man of integrity in a land of gold

The years turned. Umayr became a man and a warrior, and the description of him is striking precisely because it is so quiet. Always in the first row of the prayer. Always in the first row of the battle. Saying almost nothing. He was the servant who wants no part of politics or position or being seen, who shows up to give and then steps back. He fought through Syria under the great commander Abu Ubaydah and settled in that conquered land.

It was a dangerous place for a soul. Syria, the heart of what had been Byzantine wealth, was a country of riches, and Umar ibn al-Khattab was famously careful about whom he would station there, because nothing corrupts a governor faster than a treasury he can dip into. So when Umar chose his men for Syria, he chose for one quality above all: a fear of Allah strong enough to stay honest where dishonesty is easy. He made Umayr governor, first near Damascus and then over Homs, a city even richer and more significant at the time.

Umayr governed the way he had prayed: as a servant, not an owner. He climbed the pulpit in Homs and gave a sermon that is still quoted. Islam, he said, is a fortified wall with a secure gate. The wall of that fortress is justice, and its gate is truth. When the wall is broken and the gate smashed, the fortress is breached and everything inside is lost. And then the line that names the whole man: the strength of Islam is not in killing with the sword or striking with the whip; it is in judging by truth and taking only with justice. The boy who would not let a lie stand in the masjid had become a ruler who would not let injustice stand in his city.

The governor who walked

For a full year, something puzzled Umar. From Homs there came no complaints against its governor, and also no money for the

treasury. Silence in both directions. So Umar summoned Umayr to Madinah.

Umayr came. He took a worn-out pouch, a bowl, a cup, and his spear, and he walked. He had no camel and no horse, though he was the governor of one of the wealthiest cities under Muslim rule, and he walked the entire distance from Homs to Madinah on his own feet, and very nearly died on the road. He arrived sunburnt, exhausted, his feet blistered, barely alive.

Umar looked at him and asked what had happened to him. Listen to the answer, because it is the answer of a man who measures wealth by a different scale entirely. I am healthy, he said, all praise to Allah, and it is as if I possess the whole world. I have my pouch, in which I carry my provisions. I have my vessel, from which I drink and with which I wash. And I had enough water for the journey. Healthy, fed, and clean, and in his own estimation he owned everything worth owning.

Umar pressed him. Did you come on foot? Yes. Did they not allot you a mount as governor, did I not send you means? And Umayr answered that he had disposed of those things in a way better than keeping them. And the treasury, Umar asked, the wealth I entrusted to you, where is it? Umayr said he had given it to the rightful people among them, that whenever something came to him he placed it in its rightful place and fulfilled the rights of the people. He had collected responsibly and dispersed responsibly, and that was precisely why no complaint had ever reached Madinah and no surplus either. Well done, Umar said. You truly are one of a kind. And he asked to renew the appointment.

Umayr refused. I do not want to work for you, he said, nor for anyone after you. The trust was too heavy, the fear of Allah too real. This is the very thing Umar loved in him, and it is the rarest

thing in any age: a man who fears the weight of power more than he desires its rewards.

The test, and where the money went

Umar was not finished. He wanted to see the truth of this man one more time, and he devised a quiet test. He gave a sum of money to a man and sent him to Homs to stay with Umayr as a guest. If you find his situation comfortable, Umar said, keep the money and come back. But if you find him in the hardship he seems to be in, give him every coin of it.

The man went and lodged with Umayr for three nights. He found a life of severe frugality. At night Umayr would hand him a single piece of bread, and the guest never once saw what Umayr and his wife themselves were eating. On the third day, as he was leaving, someone told him the truth: the governor and his family live so hard that they have only these few loaves, and they give them away to others before themselves, so they go hungry. The bread he is serving you is the only bread in the house. Try not to take it.

So the guest produced the money and explained that Umar had sent it. And Umayr said: give it back to him, and give him my greeting, and tell him Umayr has no need of it. It was his wife, in a moment of pure and understandable humanity, who cried out, take the money. She said, keep what we need and give the rest to the poor. So he took it.

And here is what Umayr ibn Sa'd did with a windfall sent to a starving household. He went out and distributed it among the poor, and he sought out, especially, the children of the martyrs, the orphans of the men who had fallen in the cause of Allah. He

said you cannot honor them enough. He kept, for himself and his family, almost nothing.

When word reached Umar of what had become of the money, he sent to ask Umayr directly. And Umayr's reply was the seal on his whole life. He said he had sent it ahead for himself, for the day when neither children nor wealth will be of any use to a person. He named no recipients, claimed no credit, spoke only of the account he was building with his Lord for the Day of Judgment. As for some food and clothes Umar then offered him, he said he had enough flour to make his bread and needed none, and he would take the garments only to give to his wife, who had been tested hardest, so that she might have something to wear.

Umayr passed away during Umar's lifetime. And Umar, who had ruled an empire and known its greatest men, said of this quiet governor: if only I had more men like Umayr, to help me govern the affairs of the Muslims.

What Umayr's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to close a life like this with applause and nothing more, to admire the integrity from a safe distance and leave it on the shelf with the other heroes. That would be a waste of him. Umayr ibn Sa'd is not a monument. He is a mirror, and the face in it is our own.

Begin with the quality Umar named: he was one of a kind because he was one single person all the way through. The boy in the first row and the governor walking barefoot to Madinah were the same man, because what he did, he did for Allah and not for any human eye. This is ikhlas, sincerity, and it is the rarest and most decisive thing in the religion. The hypocrites of Surah at-Tawbah were not exposed for lacking courage; they were

exposed for being one person in front of the Prophet ﷺ and another in their hearts. Umayr is the photographic negative of that hypocrisy. So ask yourself, honestly, the question his life puts to you: how much of what you do would survive if no one ever found out you did it? The deed done in secret, for Allah alone, with no thank-you and no audience, is the deed that proves your heart belongs to Him. Choose one such deed today, something no one will ever know about, and give it to your Lord.

See, too, where he kept his treasure. Umar offered him a province; he asked instead for a clean account on the Day of Judgment. He took money meant to feed his own hungry children and sent it ahead to the orphans of the martyrs and to his own grave, saying he was depositing it for the day when wealth and children will be of no use. He believed, with his whole life and not merely his tongue, the promise that what you give to Allah is not gone but stored, that it travels ahead of you to a place where you will need it more than you need it now. Most of us believe that promise faintly, the way we believe a fact we have memorized. Umayr believed it the way you believe the ground will hold your foot. Strengthen that belief in one concrete act this week: give something away that you would rather keep, and let the only witness be Allah, and feel the promise become real in you.

And learn from the hardest hour of his youth. When the man he loved most spoke a word against Allah, Umayr did not let love silence his duty, and he did not let duty kill his love. He told the truth and wept while he told it. That is what it looks like to love Allah above everyone, and the mercy of it is that his loyalty to Allah became the very thing that saved the man he loved. We are not often asked to choose so sharply, but we are asked, every day, in small things, whether our fear of disappointing people will override our duty to our Lord. His life asks whether you will keep

your integrity intact when keeping it costs you something, a friendship, a comfort, an advantage, a province. Whoever knows Allah in their youth will not sell their religion in their old age. Know Him now, in the ordinary front rows of your own life, in the prayer you guard and the honesty you refuse to bend, and you will not be for sale later, whatever the price offered.

May Allah be pleased with Umayr ibn Sa'd, the one of a kind, who was the same servant in poverty and in power and asked only that his Lord be the One to see. May Allah grant us a measure of his sincerity, settle our treasure with Him before the Day when nothing else will help us, and keep us, in private and in public, His alone.

This chapter follows the account of Umayr ibn Sa'd (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (9:74). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Zayd ibn al-Arqam

The One Whom Revelation Vindicated

There are companions whose names ring through the centuries, and there are companions who almost slip past us because too many men carried the same name. Zayd ibn al-Arqam (may Allah be pleased with him) belongs to the second kind, and that is a quiet injustice, because the scholars of hadith counted him among the most prominent of the companions, a man from whom nearly a hundred sayings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ have come down to us. He was famous in his own time. He simply had a common name, and the crowd of Zayds around the Prophet ﷺ has hidden him from ours.

He deserves to be seen, because his life answers a question every sincere believer eventually asks in the dark: what do I do when I told the truth, the truth was not believed, and I was left looking like the liar? Zayd lived that exact trial, and the answer that came to him did not come from a friend or a judge, or even from the Prophet ﷺ himself. It came down from the heaven, in words still recited today.

An orphan raised in a great house

Zayd was born into the Khazraj, one of the two elite tribes of the Ansar in Madinah. His father died while he was still a boy, and so his story begins where so many of the most blessed stories in

Islam begin: with an orphan, and with someone who refused to leave that orphan alone.

The man who took him in was Abdullah ibn Rawahah (may Allah be pleased with him), and to know who raised Zayd is to already know half of who Zayd would become. He was no ordinary guardian: among the first handful of the Ansar to accept Islam, a chief of the Khazraj, a scribe who wrote down the revelation, a poet who defended the Prophet ﷺ with his tongue, and one of the few who fasted alongside the Prophet ﷺ on days when no one else fasted. His piety was so deep that his own brother, after Abdullah died, used to pray for protection from any sin that would shame him before Abdullah. This is the man into whose house an orphaned boy was placed.

So Zayd grew up learning to read and write in an age when most could do neither, around the recitation of Qur'an, around scholarship and courage, around a father figure who would one day ride out to battle and never come back. The qualities of Abdullah ibn Rawahah passed quietly into the boy he raised. And there is a lesson worth pausing on before the story even properly begins: a man already heavy with good deeds, already high in station, still made room for one orphan, and that orphan became a treasury of the Prophet's words for the entire ummah. The good you do for one overlooked child may outlive everything else you build.

When Abdullah ibn Rawahah took the pledge of Islam, he took it on behalf of his household, and so the orphan in his care entered Islam with him. In this way Zayd, too, was counted among the early ones, the ones who carried this religion into Madinah before the Prophet ﷺ had even arrived there.

A boy too young for the sword

Zayd's earliest memory of the friction in Madinah was not a battle. It was an insult.

Very early on, before Badr, the Prophet ﷺ rode a donkey to visit the ailing Sa'd ibn Ubadah, and passed a mixed gathering of Muslims, idol worshippers, and some of the Jewish tribes. Among them sat Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul, the man the histories remember as the chief of the hypocrites of Madinah. He had been on the verge of being crowned king of the city; then the Ansar went to Makkah, brought the Prophet ﷺ back with them, and his crown evaporated. He never forgave it. Not yet pretending to be a Muslim, his contempt was open: he covered his nose against the animal's dust and told the Prophet ﷺ to keep away. The Prophet ﷺ did not answer insult with insult. He climbed down, greeted the gathering, and began to recite Qur'an and invite them to Allah, until the believers pushed back and a quarrel broke out. This was the first time hypocrisy showed its face in Madinah, and it is from Zayd, a watching boy, that much of how we understand these early scenes has come down to us.

When the day of Badr arrived, Zayd presented himself for battle and was turned away, among a group of youths whom the Prophet ﷺ judged too young to fight. But the Prophet ﷺ did not send the boys home empty-handed. He told them to take up their weapons and guard the city, to protect the women and children of Madinah in case the enemy slipped through. So Zayd's first service was to stand watch over the vulnerable. The great test of his life would come later, on a campaign that history remembers for far more than its fighting.

The well, the well-water, and the word of treason

The campaign was against the tribe of Banu al-Mustaliq, the expedition also called al-Muraysi'. On the journey home, the believers stopped at a well, and two men fell to fighting over the water. They were ordinary men, but the reports suggest one was from the Muhajirun and the other from the Ansar, a Makkan and a Madinan, and that was all Abdullah ibn Ubayy needed.

He had been waiting for an opening. The Muslims had survived everything thrown at them, and so he had taken to wearing the mask of Islam in public while his heart stayed where it had always been. Now, with a sense of urgency, he reached for the old poison: the people of Makkah came here and ruined what we had, he told the Ansar; we were fine before they arrived. If you fatten your dog, he liked to say, it will turn and eat you, casting the Muhajirun, who had abandoned everything for their faith, as ingrates feeding off Madinan generosity. And then he crossed the final line, saying that no one should spend on those with the Messenger of Allah until they scattered from him, and that once they returned to Madinah, the honored one would drive out the humiliated one, meaning himself the honored one, and the Prophet ﷺ the one to be expelled.

Zayd was there. He was young, but he was of a noble house of the Ansar, and he understood exactly what he had heard. This was not grumbling. This was treason and disbelief of the highest order, spoken by a man pretending to be a believer. Zayd told him plainly: I am going to tell the Prophet ﷺ what you said. Ibn Ubayy waved him off, you are just a boy, and tried to reframe it as a joke when he saw the boy was serious. But Zayd answered with a line that reveals the whole shape of his character: by Allah, if my own father had said what you just said, I would tell the Prophet ﷺ. There was no one on earth he would shield from the truth, not even the man who raised him.

So Zayd went to the Prophet ﷺ and reported it. Umar, present and furious, asked permission to deal with the hypocrite at once. The Prophet ﷺ refused, saying he did not want people to say that Muhammad ﷺ kills his own companions. Note what is happening, because it is subtle and it is sunnah. By any standard of justice the man deserved death; he had openly plotted to overthrow the head of the community. Yet the Prophet ﷺ judged that, where a matter is not one of binding obligation and nothing of the religion's foundation is compromised, a leader may weigh how an action will look to others. He chose grace, not because the principle was weak, but because the cause of guiding people to Allah was strong, and he would not hand its enemies an easy slander. There are times a believer must say, "I do not care what anyone thinks, I will do what is right," and times when the more faithful thing is to consider what a choice will do to the message one carries. The Prophet ﷺ held both, perfectly.

The grief of being thought a liar

Back in Madinah, the Prophet ﷺ summoned Abdullah ibn Ubayy and gave him a fair hearing. The man swore by Allah that he had said no such thing. And the others around him backed his oath.

This is the signature of the hypocrite. The Prophet ﷺ taught that among its signs is that when such a person argues, he transgresses, and when he speaks, he lies. A man who does not fear Allah when he lies will reach for Allah's name to dress the lie up, swearing oaths and embellishing, doing whatever it takes to escape the moment. So Ibn Ubayy swore, and Zayd sat there hearing it, knowing it was false, and the Prophet ﷺ said he would take the man at his word.

Imagine being Zayd in that instant. You stepped forward to do the right thing, reported treason out of loyalty to the Prophet ﷺ, and

now the oath of a liar has been accepted and you are the one left looking dishonest. Zayd was overwhelmed with grief and embarrassment. And when he went home, even his family turned on him: his uncle, most likely Abdullah ibn Rawahah himself, scolded him, saying in effect, was there nothing better for you to do than to land yourself where the Prophet ﷺ thinks you a liar, the Muslims think you a liar, and your whole family is shamed?

So Zayd did the only thing left to a believer in that position. He turned to Allah, making du'a that revelation would come down, because he knew nothing in the world could settle this except a word from above doubt itself. He did not plot against Ibn Ubayy. He did not nurse resentment against the Prophet ﷺ, who was simply governing as a just leader must. He laid his wounded, misunderstood heart before the only One who already knew the truth in full.

And then a small, beautiful thing happened. The Prophet ﷺ came to him, took him by the ear, and laughed in his face, which, for the Prophet ﷺ, meant a wide, reassuring smile that showed his back teeth, for he did not laugh out loud. It was a smile that said, without words, I know what you are going through; wait. Zayd later said nothing in the world had ever made him happier. Abu Bakr passed and, hearing what had happened, told him to take heart, good news was coming. Umar came and gave him the same comfort. And Zayd sat at home and waited.

The verses from above the seven heavens

Then Allah sent down the opening verses of Surah al-Munafiqun, the chapter of the Hypocrites, beginning by exposing the very oath Ibn Ubayy had sworn:

When the hypocrites come to you [Prophet], they say, 'We bear witness that you are the Messenger of God.' God knows that you truly are His Messenger and He bears witness that the hypocrites are liars - >

QUR'AN 63:1

And then, further down, Allah recorded for all time the exact words Zayd had reported, the words the man had sworn under oath he never said:

They are the ones who say, 'Give nothing to those who follow God's Messenger, until they abandon him', but to God belong the treasures of the heavens and earth, though the hypocrites do not understand this. They say, 'Once we return to Medina the powerful will drive out the weak,' but power belongs to God, to His Messenger, and to the believers, though the hypocrites do not know this.

QUR'AN 63:7-8

The Prophet ﷺ called Zayd, recited the verses, and told him that Allah had confirmed what he had said. Allah Himself had vindicated the boy. A young man, dismissed, doubted, shamed before his family, was answered not by a human verdict but by the Lord of the heavens and the earth, in words that would be recited in prayer until the end of time. The histories pair this with the vindication of our mother Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), cleared of slander by revelation on this very same campaign. Allah does not abandon the truthful. He may let them sit a while in the discomfort of being misjudged, but He is recording, and in His time He clears their name in a way no human court ever could.

As for Ibn Ubayy, the believers asked what would now be done to him. The answer was, again, nothing, and nothing was the

heaviest blow of all. After these verses the man collapsed in the eyes of his own people, and the Prophet's calm refusal to so much as punish him only lowered him further, until his hypocrisy had buried his standing entirely.

Zayd would be vindicated by revelation more than once. On another occasion, when men came shouting for the Prophet ﷺ from behind his private chambers, a verse came down rebuking them, and again the Prophet ﷺ told Zayd that Allah had counted him among the truthful. To be named among the truthful by your Lord is a station few will ever reach.

A living memory of the Prophet ﷺ

Because Zayd was young when the Prophet ﷺ lived and old when he died, he became a window through which later generations could see the religion taking shape. From him we learn that in the earliest days believers used to speak during the prayer, until the Prophet ﷺ taught that Allah had once permitted this but now forbade it. From him come many of the narrations on the virtues of the Ansar, including the Prophet's prayer for them and their children and their children's children.

And from Zayd comes one of the most hope-filled sayings a believer can carry. He said that while they walked, the Prophet ﷺ stopped and told them they did not even equal a hundred-thousandth of those who would come to him at his Pool on the Day of Resurrection. Asked how many they were that day, he said seven or eight hundred. A whole ummah was coming after them, an ocean of believers the Prophet ﷺ was waiting to receive at his fountain. Among the words Zayd preserved and taught, insisting the Prophet ﷺ had commanded that they not be abandoned, was this supplication: O Allah, I seek refuge in You

from incapacity, from laziness, from miserliness, from cowardice, from the frailty of old age, and from the punishment of the grave. O Allah, grant my soul its piety and purify it, for You are the best to purify it; You are its Guardian and its Master. O Allah, I seek refuge in You from a soul that is never satisfied, from a heart that is not humble, from knowledge that brings no benefit, and from a supplication that is not answered.

Blindness, patience, and a light restored

Two more tests marked his life. He rode out to the battle of Mu'tah on the saddle-pad of Abdullah ibn Rawahah, and there he watched the man who had raised him plunge into the enemy and die a martyr. Mu'tah took three commanders in a single day, and the orphan who had been carried to the battlefield came home having lost his second father.

The other test came near the end of the Prophet's life, when Zayd, still a young man, went blind. The Prophet ﷺ came to visit him and asked a striking question: if your sight never returns, what will you do? It takes a tender, knowing heart to prepare a grieving person rather than only to comfort him. Zayd gave the answer of a believer: I will be patient, and I will seek the reward from Allah. The Prophet ﷺ told him that if he did so, he would enter Paradise and meet Allah with no sin upon him, for Allah has promised Paradise to the servant whose two eyes He takes and who bears it with patience.

Then something quietly miraculous followed. After the Prophet ﷺ passed away, Zayd's sight was restored. The reward of his patience had been secured the moment he resolved to be patient, and yet Allah returned to him the very thing he had been willing to lose: the one who resolves to meet trial with patience keeps that reward, even when the trial is later lifted.

Zayd lived a long life after that, a bastion of knowledge in the mosque; one companion, asked about currency exchange, sent the questioner to Zayd, saying Zayd was more knowledgeable and better than himself. He settled in Kufa, and he loved and praised the family of the Prophet ﷺ and narrated their virtues. When much of the Ansar was killed in the massacre of al-Harrah, he consoled the grieving with glad tidings he had heard from the Prophet ﷺ, that Allah would forgive the Ansar and their offspring and the offspring of their offspring. And in his old age, when people pressed him for hadith, he answered with the fear of a man who understood the weight of speaking for the Prophet ﷺ: we have grown old, and sometimes I forget now, and to speak on behalf of the Prophet ﷺ is a serious thing. So he held his tongue rather than risk error, and died a quiet death in Kufa around the time of the killing of al-Husayn, having left the ummah close to a hundred of the Prophet's sayings.

What Zayd's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read Zayd's story as a tale of vindication and stop there, enjoying the moment the verses come down and the liar is exposed. But the part that should reach into your own life is not the vindication. It is everything Zayd did before it arrived.

He told the truth when it cost him. He reported what he heard knowing it would set him against a powerful man, and he said the words that should be carved into every honest heart: by Allah, if my own father had said it, I would still tell the Prophet ﷺ. There is a kind of courage that needs no battlefield. It is the courage to say what is true when silence would be safer, when the people around you would rather you let it go, when the one you must report is someone you love. Ask yourself where you have softened the truth to keep the peace, and whether your loyalty to

Allah is strong enough to speak plainly for His sake even when it makes you the uncomfortable one in the room.

Then, when the truth was not believed, watch what he did and did not do. He did not scheme. He did not turn bitter against the Prophet ﷺ for ruling justly. He did not try to clear his own name by his own hand. He took his grief and the sting of being thought a liar and turned it into du'a, asking Allah to send down the truth. This is the quiet center of his faith, and the lesson most of us need. When you are misunderstood, when you did right and were blamed for it, you have a choice: you can claw at the situation, or you can lay it before the One who already knows exactly what happened and trust Him to set it right in His time. Zayd chose Allah, and Allah cleared his name from above the seven heavens. Your vindication may not arrive in revelation, but the same Lord is recording, and He does not forget the one who was wronged and stayed patient and sincere.

See, too, how he met Allah's decree. Offered the prospect of lifelong blindness, he did not bargain or despair; he said he would be patient and seek the reward from Allah, and meant it so completely that the reward was his before the trial had run its course. That is contentment with Allah's decree, the kind that does not depend on the outcome: not a clenched endurance, but a heart that says the reward with Allah is enough, and rests.

So take something from Zayd into this very week. When you witness something untrue and silence would be easier, speak the truth for Allah's sake, gently and plainly. When you are wronged, before you defend yourself to people, turn first to Allah and ask Him to set it right, then let it rest in His hands. And teach your tongue the du'a he carried, asking Allah for a soul that is satisfied, a heart that is humble, knowledge that benefits, and a

prayer that is answered. These are not the habits of admiration; they are the habits of a living faith, and they were within reach of an orphan boy in Madinah, which means they are within reach of you. May Allah be pleased with Zayd ibn al-Arqam, who told the truth and waited on his Lord, grant us a measure of his honesty, his patience, and his trust, and gather us with the Prophet ﷺ at his Pool.

This chapter follows the account of Zayd ibn al-Arqam (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (63:1, 63:7-8). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Fatima bint Qays

The Refugee Whose Case Became Law

There are companions whose names fill the books, whose battles and sermons and journeys are recounted across hundreds of pages. And then there are companions like Fatima bint Qays (may Allah be pleased with her), whose own mention in the histories is brief, almost passing, yet whose life left a mark on this religion that we still feel today. Open a manual of Islamic law on the rights of a divorced woman, on where she must spend her waiting period, on what she is owed and what she is not, and you will find her there. She is the touchstone. A single woman, a refugee far from her people, lived through one painful chapter of her life, and that chapter became a reference point that scholars have debated and built upon for fourteen centuries.

This is the strange and quiet grace of her story. She did not set out to teach anyone anything. She simply lived, faithfully, through hardship and dignity, and Allah made her ordinary trials into a lamp for the whole ummah.

A woman of standing in Makkah

She was Fatima bint Qays, and she belonged to the early ones. She and her brother, who was about ten years younger than her so that she was the elder, embraced Islam in Makkah in the first days, when the religion was small and dangerous and there was no advantage in it at all. They were of a powerful tribe, people of

name and lineage, and her mother too came from a house of standing. To be a Muslim in those years was to risk everything one's family had built. She and her brother chose it anyway.

The books that mention her do not give us much, but what they give is striking. She is described as a woman of supreme beauty, of supreme intellect, of completeness. She was, by every account, the total package: elite in status, elite in beauty, elite in mind. In a society that measured worth by blood and bearing, she had all of it. Everyone would have wanted to marry into her line.

She was married, in Makkah, to her first husband, a man of the same proud clan that produced some of the fiercest early enemies of the message, the tribe of Banu Makhzum. He was a cousin within that powerful family. And when the believers were finally permitted to leave the city that had persecuted them, she made the hijra to Madinah. She was among the Muhajirun, the emigrants who left their homes and wealth behind for the sake of Allah. That single act tells you what kind of faith she carried. She did not cling to the comfort of her tribe. She walked away from it.

The hadith she carried

Before we come to the trial that made her a point of law, it is worth pausing on something else she preserved for us, because it shows the trust the early community placed in her memory and her honesty.

There is a long and famous narration in the books of hadith, the account of Tamim al-Dari, a man who had once been a Christian and who came to the Prophet ﷺ with a strange and sober story. He told of being lost at sea, of landing on a far island, of encountering there a creature and a chained, waiting figure who questioned him about the affairs of the Arabs and the Prophet ﷺ,

signs and warnings tied to the end of time and to the Dajjal. The Prophet ﷺ judged the account true and recounted it to the people from the pulpit.

And how do we have this hadith? Because Fatima bint Qays was there, and she remembered, and she narrated it. She said that she was sitting in the front row of the women when the Prophet ﷺ stood on the minbar and told them what Tamim had shared. She carried that account forward, word by word, so that it reached the generations after her. A woman trusted enough that her testimony became part of the record by which Muslims understand the trials of the last days. That is no small station.

The divorce, and a refugee with nothing

Then came the hardest part of her life, and the part that history would never forget.

Her first husband divorced her. Not once, but to the point of an irrevocable, final divorce, the kind from which there is no easy return. And here is the cruelty of her situation: she was not surrounded by her powerful tribe to absorb the blow. Remember where she was. She was a refugee in Madinah, far from her people. She and her husband were both from great families, but at that moment they were simply two emigrants who had left everything behind, and now the marriage that held her had broken.

He gave her almost nothing. No real maintenance, no proper housing, no provision to live on. By her own account, all she received was five containers of barley and five containers of wheat, and that was the whole of it. She had no children to anchor her claim, no home to stay in, no income to lean on. She was, by any measure of the world, alone and exposed.

It was, in a sense, one of the earliest refugee problems of the new community, and it landed at the feet of the Prophet ﷺ himself. She came to him with her complaint, and he attended to it personally. The very fact that her case reached him, that he weighed what she was owed and where she should go, tells us that the suffering of one displaced woman was not beneath the concern of the leader of the believers.

Where she would wait

The Prophet ﷺ first directed her to observe her waiting period, her iddah, in the house of a woman named Umm Sharik. But then he reconsidered, and the reason he gave is a small window into the life of early Madinah. Umm Sharik's home, he said, had a great deal of foot traffic. Many men came and went there constantly. So instead he allotted Fatima a different place: she would complete her iddah in the house of Ibn Umm Maktum, the blind companion, where she would be screened and secure, where no one would see her improperly while she waited out her term.

It is worth remembering when this happened. This was early. The verses commanding the hijab had not yet been revealed; those came around four years into the hijra. Many of the detailed laws governing how men and women should interact were still to come. So her case unfolded in a moment before much of that structure was in place, which is part of why it became so closely studied. It was a real situation, lived by real people, and from it the scholars would later draw lessons about modesty, about protection, about the dignity owed to a woman in a vulnerable hour.

This is also why her case became a source of contention among the jurists for generations. What exactly is a finally divorced

woman entitled to? Where must she pass her iddah, and on whose support? At what point is maintenance owed, and at what point is it cut off? How does pregnancy change the answer? Fatima bint Qays, simply by living through it and reporting it faithfully, gave the ummah one of its foundational cases on all of these questions.

The proposal that changed her rank

When her waiting period was nearing its end, the Prophet ﷺ told her to inform him once she became lawful to remarry, so that he himself could help arrange her future. She did. And by then, before she had even completed her term, two men had already sent proposals: Muawiya and Abu Jahm. Such was her standing that suitors were waiting at the door. Beauty, intellect, lineage, all of it drew them.

The Prophet ﷺ responded with a frankness that became a lesson in its own right. As for Muawiya, he said, he is a poor man who will not spend on you. And as for Abu Jahm, he said, he is a man who does not put down his stick, which some understood to mean that he was always traveling, and which other narrations render plainly as a warning that he was harsh with women, a man who struck them. The Prophet ﷺ advised her to avoid them both.

From this small exchange the scholars drew an important principle. To warn someone sincerely of a real harm coming their way is not the forbidden sin of backbiting. We are not to speak ill of people as a pastime or for entertainment. But when there is a genuine need, when withholding the truth would let someone walk into ruin, then it becomes right to speak, precisely so that they are protected. Manuals of Islamic ethics cite this very moment as evidence: the Prophet ﷺ telling a woman the honest truth about two suitors so that she would not be harmed.

And there is a quiet beauty in how this hadith reached us. It was narrated through the son of Abu Jahm, by way of Abu Bakr ibn Abi Jahm. The son of the very man whose proposal was turned down preserved and passed on the account of his own father's rejection. He did not bury it out of shame. He carried it forward, because it was true and because it was knowledge.

Then the Prophet ﷺ offered her something she did not expect. Marry Usama, he said. Usama ibn Zayd. Her first instinct, by her own admission, was reluctance. She thought little of the match at first; the difference in worldly standing gave her pause. But then she heard the words of the Prophet ﷺ, that obeying Allah and obeying His Messenger was better for her, that this was his counsel and he knew what he was saying. And something in her settled. She said, I hear and I obey Allah and His Messenger ﷺ. Marry me to him.

What followed was not a compromise she came to regret. It was a blessing. She herself described it afterward in the language of honor: Allah honored me through Usama, she said, and gave me nobility through him, and raised my rank through him. The marriage that her pride had hesitated over became one she treasured, a union that succeeded and was full, despite the gap in class that the world thought mattered. Their son was named Zayd, carrying forward the name of Usama's own beloved father. And from this house came children, and from those children came chains of narration that flowed on into the body of Islamic knowledge.

The house where a caliph was chosen

There is one more thing the histories tell us about her, and it confirms that her standing among the companions never faded.

Years later, when the second caliph was struck down by an assassin, he left instructions for how the next leader of the Muslims should be chosen. A small council of senior companions was to gather and deliberate among themselves until they agreed. And where did that council meet? In the house of Fatima bint Qays. The most consequential political decision the young community had yet faced, the selection of the third successor to the Prophet ﷺ, was deliberated in her living room.

That detail is easy to read past, but pause on it. A woman who had once been a penniless divorcee with five measures of grain to her name was now the keeper of a home trusted enough to host the very making of a caliph. The companions knew her. They respected her. She was described as a woman of great nobility, and those who narrated from her and carried her knowledge into the record of Islam included some of the most respected teachers of the next generation. Her life had come full circle, from refugee with nothing to a woman in whose house the future of the ummah was decided.

What Fatima bint Qays' life asks of our faith

It is easy to admire a woman like this from a distance and leave it there. But her life is not a portrait to hang on a wall. It is a question pressed gently against our own iman, and if we let it, it can change how we live.

Start with the moment she nearly missed her own blessing. When the Prophet ﷺ told her to marry Usama, she hesitated, because the match did not look impressive to her. Her pride spoke first. And then she chose to trust the command over her own calculation, and she said the words that every believer is asked to say: I hear and I obey. That is the hinge of her whole life. Allah's choice for her was better than the choice she would have made

for herself, and she could only receive the good of it once she let go of her own measuring. How often do we do the opposite? How often do we look at what Allah and His Messenger ﷺ have laid out, weigh it against what our ego wants, and quietly trust ourselves more? Her life asks you to surrender the calculation, to obey before you fully understand, and to believe that what Allah guides you toward is better even when it does not look better.

See, too, how she carried her hardship. She was divorced, displaced, given almost nothing, far from the family that could have shielded her. By every worldly account she had been wronged and left exposed. And yet there is no record of her bitterness, no narration of her cursing her fate or asking why this had come to her. She took her small measure of grain, she went where the Prophet ﷺ told her to wait, and she trusted that her affair was in better hands than her own. That is contentment with the decree of Allah, not as a slogan but as something lived through real loss. When hardship strips away the things you thought you needed, her life asks whether your trust in Allah is deep enough to hold steady without complaint, knowing that the One who decreed it is the One who provides.

And then notice the most quietly astonishing thing of all: she never knew, in the moment, that her suffering would matter to anyone but herself. She did not live through her divorce thinking, one day this will be law, one day scholars will study my case. She simply lived it honestly and reported it truthfully. And Allah took those private, painful days and made them a source of guidance and mercy for millions she would never meet. This is the promise that should lift your heart. Nothing you endure for the sake of Allah, no quiet patience, no honest word, no act of trust, is wasted, even when you cannot see what it is for. He sees it. He

records it. He can take the smallest, most overlooked chapter of your life and make it weigh more than you ever imagined.

So carry one thing from her into your own ordinary days. The next time Allah's guidance points one way and your pride points another, say what she said, and mean it: I hear and I obey. The next time you are wronged and left with less than you deserved, hold your tongue from complaint against your Lord and trust that He is arranging what you cannot see. And do your good quietly, honestly, for His sake alone, without needing it to be noticed, because the deeds done sincerely in the dark are the ones He raises highest. She did not chase status, and Allah gave her a rank in this world and the next. She did not perform her patience for an audience, and Allah made her patience a teacher for the whole ummah.

May Allah be pleased with Fatima bint Qays, the faithful refugee whose trials He turned into light, and may He grant us a share of her trust, her contentment, and her sincere obedience, and gather us with her among those who heard the truth and answered, I hear and I obey.

This chapter follows the account of Fatima bint Qays (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). No Qur'an verses are quoted, as the lecture did not cite a specific verse for direct quotation; the Prophet's counsel that obeying Allah and His Messenger ﷺ is better is reported here as his speech. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Usama ibn Zayd

The Beloved, Son of the Beloved

There are families that grow the way families usually grow: a man marries, a woman bears a child, and the bloodline runs forward in a straight line. Tribes married within tribes, and a careful man could follow how a person came to belong to a house. Nothing about the family that gathered around the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ ran in a straight line. It was assembled out of loss and rescue, out of slave markets and freed slaves, out of a love so deliberate that it broke every rule a proud society lived by. And at the center of that strange and beautiful household, held and kissed and carried on the back of the Messenger of Allah himself, was a dark-skinned boy named Usama ibn Zayd, whom the Prophet ﷺ raised as his own grandson.

To understand him, you have to understand the two people he came from, because the whole story is a story of how Allah quietly arranges what no one could plan.

Born of two rescued lives

His mother was Barakah, later known as Umm Ayman (may Allah be pleased with her), a young Abyssinian woman who had been sold as a slave in the great marketplace of Makkah, the same market where goods and people were traded side by side. The grandfather of the Prophet ﷺ bought her and gifted her to his son Abdullah, who owned almost nothing else in the world. So

when Abdullah died while the Prophet ﷺ was still in his mother Aminah's womb, and when Aminah herself died not long after, it was Barakah who was there through all of it. She comforted the widowed mother. She was present, by the most reliable accounts, when the Prophet ﷺ was born, and present again when his mother passed. He called her "my mother after my mother," and "what is left of my family." She believed in him the moment he was sent. She followed him everywhere. When he would ask, "O my mother, how are you?" she would answer, "I am well, so long as Islam is well." Hers was a life so woven into his that it is hard to find its equal in stability and love.

His father was Zayd ibn Harithah (may Allah be pleased with him), a boy born free in Arabia who went out one day on a journey with his mother and was seized by raiders and sold into slavery for four hundred dirhams, a small price for a whole life. He was bought and then gifted to Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her), who in turn gave him to the Prophet ﷺ. The bond between them was immediate. When Zayd's own father at last found him and came to take him home, Zayd refused to leave; he had chosen the Prophet ﷺ over his own family, before there was even a religion to choose. The Prophet ﷺ adopted him, and Zayd became, socially and legally, his son. The Prophet ﷺ went further: he worked to lift Zayd into the highest ranks of a society that would have looked down on a former slave, arranging noble marriages for him so that no one could treat him as less than a full and honored man. And Zayd would receive a gift no other Companion received. He is the only Companion of the Prophet ﷺ mentioned by name in the Qur'an, the only one whose name a believer recites in his daily worship.

These were the two the Prophet ﷺ brought together in marriage, a freed Abyssinian woman and a freed Arab man, and out of that

household of love and loyalty came their son. Look at the sheer improbability of it. A girl carried from Abyssinia to that one marketplace, to become like a mother to the Prophet ﷺ. A boy stolen from his family and carried to that same marketplace, to become like a son. The two joined by the Prophet ﷺ himself. We do not say the world conspired to make it happen. We say it was the decree of Allah, arranging every piece so this child could be born close to the heart of the Messenger of Allah.

The grandfather and the boy

Usama was born in Makkah, and the affection he received is hard to overstate. He came into the world before Hasan and Husayn (may Allah be pleased with them), so he was the first child the Prophet ﷺ held in the role of a grandfather. He had all the memories the others would later have: being hugged, being kissed, riding on the back of the Prophet ﷺ, riding the animal beside him, walking with him to the prayer. Many of the narrations we cherish about Hasan and Husayn actually begin with Usama. The Prophet ﷺ would gather him together with Hasan and say, "O Allah, I love them, so love them." He would carry one on each side and tell the people, "Whoever loves me, let him love these two."

Usama was born resembling his mother, with very dark skin, while his father Zayd had a lighter brown complexion. The Prophet ﷺ was frequently seen holding him and introducing him to the people as his grandson, and in doing so he was teaching, by practice and not only by words, that the worth of a person is not in his color. One night Usama came to the Prophet ﷺ and saw two small shapes moving inside his cloak; the Prophet ﷺ opened it, and out came his two sons, and he said, "These are

my two sons. O Allah, I love them, so love them, and love those who love them."

The household tended him as their own. Umm Salamah (may Allah be pleased with her) once recalled that the Prophet ﷺ asked her to bathe the boy, but she had no children of her own and did not know how. The Prophet ﷺ took him gently and bathed him himself, and then said something so tender it stays with you: that Usama was a boy, but had he been a girl, "I would have adorned him and dressed him and cared for him like a little bride until I married him off." Another time Usama stumbled at the threshold of the house and cut his forehead, and blood ran down his face. The one watching froze. The Prophet ﷺ went to him, lifted him, cleaned the wound himself, and kissed it, the way a parent does when trying to make the hurt go away. And again he said it: had this been a girl, I would have adorned her and cared for her until I married her off. This was the ordinary devotion of a grandfather to a grandson, lived out by the best of creation.

How beloved he was

There is a scene that fixes his place forever. The Prophet ﷺ was once asked, in front of others, who was most beloved to him from his family. He answered that Fatimah was most beloved of his own children. But when the question was pressed about the men of his household, he said the most beloved to him was the one whom Allah had favored and whom he himself had favored, and he pointed to Usama. His uncle Abbas was sitting there, and Ali too, and the Prophet ﷺ was balancing the different layers and dimensions of love among people he cherished. But the truth of that moment is plain: when Usama walked in, the Prophet ﷺ saw him as the immediate object of his affection, and named him, out loud, among the men he loved most.

That nearness gave him a name of his own. He came to be called the beloved, the son of the beloved, because his father Zayd was known as "the beloved" of the Prophet ﷺ, and the Prophet ﷺ himself is al-Habib, the beloved, to all of us. His entire existence had become a focal point of intense love.

But love like that draws envy, and it draws cruelty. Because Usama's skin was darker than his father's, some of Quraysh began to whisper a vile rumor, the kind of slander that questioned whether he was truly Zayd's son at all. It was a low and shameless thing, the sort of claim that is beneath dignifying with a public answer, and the Prophet ﷺ did not answer it publicly. But it wounded the boy, and it wounded the Prophet ﷺ, who knew exactly the kind of pain it caused. Then one day a man who was known for reading lineage by physical features happened to enter the house. Usama and Zayd were asleep under a single blanket, their heads covered and only their feet showing. Unprompted, the man looked at the two pairs of feet and said, "These feet are from one another." No one had asked him. The Prophet ﷺ came out so happy that he repeated it, because here was a thing said freely, without flattery, that shamed every whisper. It tells you how a community can wound the people you love most, and how Allah can lift that wound from an unexpected hand.

The journeys with the Messenger of Allah

Usama's childhood was full of rides behind the Prophet ﷺ on the camel and the donkey. The books of hadith preserve the very chapter of two men sharing one mount because of him. On one of those rides through Madinah, the Prophet ﷺ passed a mixed gathering of Muslims, Jews, and idolaters, and he gave them all the greeting of peace, and Usama remembered it and narrated it,

so that we learn from him how the Prophet ﷺ greeted a crowd that was not all believers.

He was given one of the most prestigious rides in the history of Islam. During the farewell pilgrimage, the Prophet ﷺ alternated the young ones of his family along the different stages, and Usama was his chosen companion from Arafah onward. He fetched the Prophet's camel, watched him finish his supplication, and rode behind him as the Prophet ﷺ moved through the immense crowd. Some people blamed Usama for slowing the Prophet ﷺ down, and mocked the delay; the Prophet ﷺ rebuked them. And as the masses pushed and rushed, he heard the Prophet ﷺ say, "O people, be calm, be dignified," teaching that piety is not in hurrying your camels. Usama remembered how the Prophet ﷺ would move slowly in a crowd, and when the way opened, lower his head and ride fast. He narrated every part of it.

Then came the conquest of Makkah, and a detail that should never be passed over quickly. Usama was a Makkan child, driven out young, and as they rode in he asked the Prophet ﷺ whether they would go to his old house. The Prophet ﷺ answered, in effect, "Did they leave us any house to return to?" He would not enter as a conqueror reclaiming property; he pitched a tent instead, all humility. And when the Kaaba was opened, the Prophet ﷺ entered it with only two people in the world: Bilal, his freed slave, and Usama, the son of his freed slaves, treated as his grandson. They shut the door, and stayed a long time. When they came out, Usama did not ask for honor or position. He asked exactly where the Prophet ﷺ had prayed, so he could pray there too, and Usama showed him the two pillars. In a society built on tribe and class and color, this was change worked through practice: only Bilal and Usama inside, only Bilal upon the Kaaba to call the people to prayer.

The hard lessons of justice and faith

Two incidents are narrated about Usama more than almost any others, and both are lessons that cost him something.

The first concerned a noblewoman of the powerful tribe of Banu Makhzum who was a habitual thief, who would take what was not hers and deny it to anyone too weak to challenge her clan. When the time came to carry out the penalty of Allah upon her, the people searched for someone bold enough to ask the Prophet ﷺ to set it aside, and they could think of no one but Usama, so close was he to the Messenger of Allah. See how the tables had turned: the very people who once mocked the boy's color now begged him to intercede. He went and spoke. The face of the Prophet ﷺ turned red. "Are you interceding against one of the limits set by Allah?" Usama, stricken, asked him to seek forgiveness for him. Then the Prophet ﷺ rose and addressed the people, and said that what destroyed the nations before them was exactly this: when a noble person stole, they let him go, and when a weak person stole, they crushed him with punishment. And he swore by the One in whose hand is his soul that if Fatimah, his own beloved daughter, were to steal, he would carry out the penalty upon her. Love of family does not buy a person above the Book of Allah. The woman, it is said, repented and became a sincere Muslim and one of Usama's own students. Even she could see the integrity of it.

The second is heavier still. The Prophet ﷺ had sent Usama on an expedition, and in the heat of battle Usama and another man cornered an enemy. As they were about to strike, the man said, "There is no god but Allah." The other warrior held his sword. Usama, certain the man had only said it to save his own skin, killed him. When they returned and told the Prophet ﷺ, he looked at Usama and asked, "You killed him after he said there is no god

but Allah? Did you split open his heart to know?" He kept repeating it until Usama wished the ground would take him, until he wished he had only become Muslim that very day so that all of it might be wiped clean. From that hour Usama made a vow that shaped the rest of his life: he would never again fight anyone who said "there is no god but Allah." The lesson he carried out of that day was simple and severe. We do not judge what is in another person's heart. We are not given to know whose faith is sincere and whose is not.

Steadfast on the order of a dying man

When Zayd, his father, was martyred at Mu'tah leading the Muslims against the Romans, it was Usama, still a youth, whom the Prophet ﷺ had to console, and it was then that Usama inherited his father's title: the beloved, the son of the beloved. Then, in the very last days of the Prophet's life, the Prophet ﷺ appointed Usama, only seventeen years old, to command an army against the Romans, the greatest empire on earth, including among his soldiers men decades older and far more experienced. Some murmured at it. The Prophet ﷺ stood and answered: if you doubt his leadership, you doubted his father's leadership before him, and by Allah his father was fit for it and was among the most beloved of people to me, and this one is fit for it, and he is among the most beloved of people to me after his father. As the Prophet ﷺ slipped in and out of consciousness in his final illness, he kept asking, "Has the army of Usama gone out? Dispatch the army of Usama." He did not want the world to pause for his own death.

When the Prophet ﷺ died, everything froze, and the question returned: should the campaign go forward now, with the Romans pressing and Madinah fragile? Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) was unmovable. Usama would go. Some of the senior

Companions sent Umar to ask that an older man replace the boy. Abu Bakr leapt up, took hold of Umar, and said, in effect, "Shall I undo a knot the Messenger of Allah tied with his own hand?" He swore he would never reverse a single command of the Prophet ﷺ, though the beasts and birds were to seize him. And so the army of Usama went out, and it came back successful. The news reached Heraclius of Rome on the same day he learned the Prophet ﷺ had died, and he marveled that a people whose leader had just passed would still march out to fight, and would not pause. That, in the end, is what the obedient love of these believers looked like.

What Usama's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read Usama's life and feel only warmth, to picture a child loved by the best of all people and leave it there, as a sweet story about a kind grandfather. That would be to miss what his life is actually asking of us.

Begin with the slander he had to live under. People looked at his dark skin and questioned whether he even belonged, and the rumor hurt him before any kindness eased it. We live among the same whispering. We size people up by appearance and origin, we decide quietly who is "really" one of us, we let our own hearts run the very judgments Quraysh ran. Usama's life asks us to drop that scale entirely. The Prophet ﷺ honored him in front of everyone and brought him, with Bilal, into the Kaaba while nobles waited outside, because nearness to Allah is not measured by color or class. To imitate this is concrete and it is for the sake of Allah: refuse, today, to value a person by the things Allah does not value, and show honor to the one the world overlooks. That is faith expressed as justice.

Then there is the hardest thing he was ever told. "Did you split open his heart to know?" Usama killed a man who professed faith, certain he was insincere, and the Prophet ﷺ would not let it rest. The lesson belongs to all of us who are so quick to decide that someone's prayer is for show, that someone's repentance is fake, that we already know how that person "really" is. We are not given knowledge of hearts. Allah alone owns that knowledge. When you catch yourself ruling on another believer's sincerity, remember the man in the battlefield, and let the matter go to the One who actually sees. Guard your tongue and your assumptions, and leave the heart of your brother and sister to its Lord.

And hold on to what Abu Bakr did with the army. The Prophet ﷺ had died, the situation was frightening, every worldly calculation said to delay, and Abu Bakr refused to loosen a single knot the Messenger of Allah had tied. That is what it looks like to trust Allah's order over your own fear. Most of us obey when obedience is comfortable and start negotiating the moment it costs us. Usama's whole life, from riding behind the Prophet ﷺ as a child to commanding men as a youth, was lived inside that trust, and at the end he refused to draw his sword in the discord between Muslims, holding to the lesson of that one terrible day rather than to the pull of a faction. Steadfastness on what you know Allah wants, even when the ground is shaking and the easier road is right there, is the very texture of iman. Choose one command of Allah that has lately grown heavy for you, a prayer you have been delaying, a tongue you have not been guarding, a person you have been too proud to forgive, and keep it today the way Abu Bakr kept that knot tied, for no reason except that it is from your Lord.

This is a religion that took a stolen boy and a purchased girl and made of their son a grandson of the Prophet ﷺ, beloved and honored, his faith and his color and his youth no barrier at all to nearness with Allah. The same door is open to anyone who walks toward it in sincerity and trust. May Allah be pleased with Usama ibn Zayd, the beloved son of the beloved, and grant us his trust in Allah's promise, his obedience without bargaining, and a place in the company of those the Messenger of Allah ﷺ loved.

This chapter follows the account of Usama ibn Zayd (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed. No Qur'anic verse is quoted, as none is cited verbatim in the source lecture; the reference to Zayd ibn Harithah as the only Companion named in the Qur'an points to Surah al-Ahzab (33:37).

Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-As

The One Who Preserved the Sunnah

There is a kind of companion who never stands at the center of the story. He sits a little to the side, a pen in his hand and a leather tablet on his knee, and while everyone else is living the history, he is quietly writing it down. Centuries later, when you open one of the great books of hadith and read a saying of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that steadies your heart, there is a real chance it reached you because of him.

His name was Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-As (may Allah be pleased with him). He was born into a house that fought the Prophet ﷺ, grew up proud and certain of his own superiority, and became one of the young men who, more than almost anyone else, preserved the words of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ for every generation that came after.

A son who was almost his father's brother

To understand him, you first have to sit with a fact that startles every reader who meets it. Abdullah was born when his father, Amr ibn al-As, was only about eleven years old; the historians record it consistently. The consequence for our story is simple: father and son were barely a decade apart, and Abdullah grew up not as a child trailing behind a grown man but almost as his father's companion and right hand. So when Islam finally entered

that house, it entered through a bond less like father and son than like two brothers who had walked every road together.

His father was for a long time one of the great enemies of the Prophet ﷺ, persecuting the Muslims in Makkah and fighting them at Madinah. The persecution grew so heavy that the Prophet ﷺ once supplicated against the men leading it, and Allah revealed that the final verdict on such people was not the Prophet's to give:

Whether God relents towards them or punishes them is not for you [Prophet] to decide: they are wrongdoers.

QUR'AN 3:128

That verse is the lesson of Abdullah's whole family. The judgment was left with Allah, and Allah's decision was mercy. Amr would one day embrace Islam and open Egypt, and his son would become a treasury of the Sunnah. Every great enemy of the Prophet ﷺ, it seems, was answered the same way: Allah guided him, or guided his children, or both. The Prophet ﷺ had taught the believers never to give up hope in the children, and here that hope was answered.

The boy named after the most condemned man

His name was not always Abdullah. He was born and called al-As, after his grandfather, the father of Amr. To name a firstborn after the grandfather was an honor among the Arabs, but the name itself carries hard meanings: the disobedient one, the stubborn, the defiant. And the man it honored was counted among the most condemned figures in the entire Qur'an, one of those who sneered that when Muhammad ﷺ died no one would remember him, because he had no surviving sons.

Now hold the two facts side by side. The grandfather said the Prophet's memory would die because he had no sons. And the grandson who carried that man's name became the first to write down the sayings of the Prophet ﷺ by the hundreds, and pushed them forward until they were absorbed into the most trusted books of hadith and recited across the whole earth, fifteen centuries later. Allah took the very name of the man who said "he will be forgotten" and made it the name of one of those who made sure the Prophet ﷺ would never be forgotten.

When the boy came to the Prophet ﷺ, the Prophet ﷺ changed his name from al-As to Abdullah, the servant of Allah. The change fit, for the two could not have been more opposite. The grandfather was defiance itself; Abdullah was famous above all for obedience, obedient to his father almost to a fault, as his life would show. He had embraced Islam quietly, a full year before either of his parents, his heart already leaning toward the truth. The Prophet ﷺ praised the whole family, calling it a blessed house.

Catching up, and a tablet called the Truthful

Abdullah's upbringing was the mirror opposite of the other young companions. Raised in luxury and in arrogance, groomed to lead his tribe, he inherited his father's sharp intelligence and the pride that came with such a family, and he came to Islam with a great deal to unlearn. When the Prophet ﷺ saw him in two garments dyed bright saffron, the fine clothes of his old life, he told him it would be better to burn them, for these were not clothes for a young man in Islam. Here, then, is the shape of his whole struggle, and many believers will recognize it. He came into Madinah, looked at companions his own age who were already deep in the religion, felt desperately behind, and threw himself at

the faith trying to seize the whole of it at once. He is the case study the books reach for when they discuss going too far, too fast: not violence, but an overzealous rushing that tries to swallow the religion whole in one gulp.

Much of what he did was magnificent. He memorized the whole Qur'an in his first year as a Muslim, a feat only a small group achieved, and sat at the feet of the most learned, chief among them Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, of whom he said, "I loved him, and I will never stop loving him." But what set him apart from nearly every other companion was not his memory. It was his pen. He asked the Prophet ﷺ whether he might write down what he said, for he wanted to support his heart with his hand, and the Prophet ﷺ gave him permission.

The context matters. In the earliest days the Prophet ﷺ had discouraged the companions from writing his words, lest they be confused with the Qur'an while it was still being compiled. Once that fear had passed, preserving his words in writing became permitted. When some of the Quraysh objected, reminding Abdullah that the Prophet ﷺ was a human being who spoke in many moods, he stopped, and mentioned it. The Prophet ﷺ pointed to his own mouth and said, "Write. By the One in whose hand is my soul, nothing comes out of this mouth except the truth." So he kept writing.

His collection had a name: as-Sahifah as-Sadiqah, the Truthful Tablet, and in it were more than seven hundred sayings written in the very presence of the Prophet ﷺ. There is an authentic report that when some companions asked him which city would fall first, Rome or Constantinople, he brought out a locked box, drew out his book, and read what he had recorded with his own hand: that the Prophet ﷺ had answered that very question, saying

Constantinople. A question of the future, answered from a tablet of the past. When a student once reached for the tablet, Abdullah stopped him: "This is the Truthful Tablet. It is what I heard from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ with no one between him and me." He used to say that if Allah left him only the Book of Allah, this tablet, and a beloved garden he had inherited, he would not care what else he lost.

The young man who tried to worship himself into the ground Abdullah's fear of Allah ran so deep it nearly broke him. "If you knew the reality of the Day of Judgment as I know it," he would say, "you would beg Allah's forgiveness until you lost your voices and broke your backs in prayer."

He was one of three men in a famous story who came to ask exactly how the Prophet ﷺ worshipped, and found the answer too modest for men as sinful as they felt themselves to be. The Prophet ﷺ prayed at night, but he also slept; he fasted, but he also broke his fast; and he was married. Surely, they reasoned, they had to do far more. One vowed to pray every night until he died, and that one was Abdullah; one vowed to fast every day; one vowed never to marry. When the Prophet ﷺ heard, he gathered them and said, "By Allah, I am the most fearful of Allah among you, and the most aware of Him, yet I fast and I break my fast, I pray and I sleep, and I marry women. Whoever turns away from my way is not of me."

That was the first lesson, and Abdullah needed it repeated. On his wedding night, when the practice is to pray two short units with one's bride, he recited the entire Qur'an in them. So the Prophet ﷺ called him in, and what follows is some of the most tender, fatherly advice in the whole Sunnah. "Is it true that you fast every day and pray every night?" Abdullah said yes. The

Prophet ﷺ told him not to: "Your Lord has a right over you. Your own self has a right over you. Your family has a right over you." He told him to fast no more than the Prophet Dawud, one day and not the next, and not to finish the Qur'an faster than once in three days.

And then he said the thing that would haunt Abdullah for the rest of his long life, and you can almost hear the plea in it: do not be like the man who used to pray and then abandoned prayer altogether. If you try to take it all in at once, you will burn out and end up unable to do any of it. Abdullah did not fully listen, and in his old age, when keeping that fierce pace had become a heavy burden, he would say again and again, "I wish I had listened to the Prophet ﷺ."

The secret of the man from Paradise

While Abdullah was driving himself toward exhaustion, the Prophet ﷺ gave him a different kind of teacher. Three days in a row, sitting among his companions, the Prophet ﷺ said, "A man from the people of Paradise is about to walk in." And three times the same man entered: not Abu Bakr, not Umar, just an ordinary man, his beard still wet from ablution, his sandals in his left hand.

Abdullah had to know what this man did to earn such words, so he invented a reason to stay three nights in his home, and watched closely. The man did not fast the optional fasts; at night he barely stirred. After three days Abdullah confessed why he had come: "I do not see you doing much. What is it?" The man said it was only what Abdullah had seen. But as Abdullah turned to leave, frustrated, the man called him back. There was one thing that might be different. "At night, I hold no malice in my heart toward any of the Muslims. I forgive everyone. I do not envy anyone for what Allah has given them." That was the whole

secret. Not the all-night prayers Abdullah was breaking his body over, but a clean heart, free of grudges and free of envy, carried into sleep each night.

It was exactly the lesson Abdullah needed: this religion is not about running yourself into the ground but about letting the worship reach the heart and reshape the character. The Prophet ﷺ taught him the same truth in small gifts, such as the words of remembrance to repeat after every prayer, counting on his fingers how those few words multiplied into thousands on the scale. You do not stand before a Lord who counts each deed as one, but before a Lord who multiplies.

The pen and the sword, and the grief of fitnah

What makes Abdullah rare is that the same hand that filled a tablet with hadith also carried a sword into battle after battle, scholar and warrior together as few men are. He was beside his father through the great conquests, often a commander himself, and many of the details we have of those battles come from the same pen that recorded the seven hundred sayings of the Prophet ﷺ. He settled at last in Egypt, and his narrations were not lost to that distance: the Musnad of Imam Ahmad holds the largest single collection of what he transmitted, and his reports run through the great books of hadith.

But for all his courage, Abdullah hated discord among the Muslims with his whole soul. He narrated many of the Prophet's warnings about the trials to come, including that Allah does not seize knowledge by tearing it away, but takes it with the death of the scholars. So when the great fitnah came and two Muslim armies faced each other at Siffin, he wanted no part of it. Yet he found himself there, on the side of his father, because the

Prophet ﷺ had once told him, "Obey your father as long as you live," and obedience was the trait that defined him.

He swore that on that day he never threw an arrow and never raised his sword; he sat with his hands lowered, refusing to fight other Muslims. But he remembered another saying of the Prophet ﷺ: that the noble companion Ammar ibn Yasir would be killed by the transgressing party. And when Abdullah saw Ammar fall on the opposite side, killed by the army his own side belonged to, he understood with horror which side was in the wrong. He had obeyed his father without shedding blood, and he hated every moment of it.

For the rest of his life that day wounded him; he would weep and say he wished he had died twenty years before it happened. Abdullah had loved and been close to Husayn ibn Ali (may Allah be pleased with him), the grandson of the Prophet ﷺ, who was deeply hurt to see him on the opposing side. The two stopped speaking, and Abdullah ached for his forgiveness, until at last he asked a respected man to intercede. When Husayn finally asked him, "Why did you fight against my father?" Abdullah answered that he had never picked up a sword, that the only thing that drew him out was the Prophet's command to obey his father. And on that day they embraced, and Husayn forgave him. There is a quiet teaching in it: that hurt between sincere believers is real, that it sometimes needs time and a reconciler to heal, and that even the best of people can be caught in trials they would give anything to undo.

A father's deathbed, and a son who stayed

Abdullah was with his father at the end. As death drew near, Amr was overcome, and his son asked him gently why. His father answered with striking humility, dividing his life into three parts.

In the first he had been an enemy of the Prophet ﷺ, and had he died then, he was sure he would have entered the Fire. In the second he had embraced Islam and fought beside the Prophet ﷺ, and would have hoped for the Garden. "But now," he said, "I do not know." Then he raised his eyes: "There is no god but You; nothing can save us except Your mercy." He gave his son one final instruction: "When you bury me, stand by my grave after the people have left, for as long as it takes to slaughter a camel and share out its meat, so that I may feel your nearness and know how to answer the angel my Lord sends to me." From that comes the practice, recorded in Muslim, of staying a while at the grave after a burial.

Abdullah lived on for years, keeping always to the edges of the disputes among the Muslims. The histories are not even certain where he died, which is fitting for a man who spent his last years deliberately out of the spotlight. He left children, and through his son Muhammad and grandson Shu'ayb came hundreds of narrations that form much of what we hold today. One of the last images we have of him is the most tender. On pilgrimage with that son, he took the boy by the hand, walked him to the spot beside the door of the Kaaba, clung to it with his chest and his cheek, and began to weep. "I saw the Prophet ﷺ do exactly this," he told him. This is how the Sunnah came to us: through a father teaching a son, a mother teaching a daughter, an aunt teaching a nephew, in the quiet rooms and private moments of love.

What Abdullah's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and take from it only a lesson about balance, that we should not overdo our worship. That

lesson is real, and Abdullah paid for it dearly. But there is something deeper here, closer to the heart of iman.

Abdullah's whole anxiety came from a kind of arithmetic with Allah. He felt behind, so he tried to pile up deeds, as if salvation were a total he had to reach by force, as if Allah counted each prayer as one and weighed the heap at the end. The Prophet ﷺ spent years dismantling that idea in him, showing him a Lord who multiplies the small thing done with sincerity, and the man from Paradise showed him the same truth from another angle: a forgiving heart carried into sleep could outweigh nights of exhausted prayer. Allah is not impressed by exhaustion. He is moved by sincerity, by a heart that is clean toward Him and clean toward His servants. Ask yourself, then, whether your own faith is a frantic tallying of deeds, or a quiet trust that the One you serve is more generous than you have dared to imagine.

Then learn from the secret of the man from Paradise, the most actionable thing in this whole life, and you can begin it tonight. Before you sleep, empty your heart of every grudge against another believer. Forgive the one who wronged you today and the one who wronged you years ago. Refuse to envy anyone for what Allah has given them, because to envy is, in truth, to quarrel with His decree. Lie down with a heart that holds nothing against anyone, for the sake of Allah alone. The Prophet ﷺ promised Paradise to a man whose only distinguishing deed was this, and it costs nothing but the willingness to let go.

There is one more gift in Abdullah's story, and it belongs to anyone who feels they came to Allah late, or wasted years, or carries a history they did not choose. He was born into a house that fought the Prophet ﷺ and named after one of the most condemned men in the Qur'an, and Allah took that very name and

that very house and made them a means of preserving the Sunnah for all time. Your past does not bind the mercy of Allah, and neither does the time you feel you have lost. He is the One who forgives, and He has said so without limit:

Say, '[God says], My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of God's mercy. God forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.

QUR'AN 39:53

That was the verse Abdullah named as the most hopeful in the whole Book. Turn to Allah now, with whatever you have, the way Abdullah turned, the way even his father turned at the very end with nothing left to offer but His mercy.

So take one thing from him into your own life this week. Forgive someone in the silence of your heart before you sleep, and mean it, for Allah. Choose one small act of worship you can keep for years rather than a heroic one you will abandon by next month. And trust that the Lord who multiplies has already seen it. May Allah be pleased with Abdullah ibn Amr, free him from the Fire he feared so deeply, raise him to the highest of the gardens he longed for, and grant us hearts as clean, and faith as steady, as the religion he gave his life to preserve.

This chapter follows the account of Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-As (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (3:128, 39:53). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed, and well-known names left

unclear in the lecture have been restored to their standard spelling.

Urwa ibn az-Zubayr

The First Muslim Historian

Almost everything you know about how the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ lived inside his own home, the way he prayed in the dark, the small and tender things that passed between him and the woman he loved, reaches you through one quiet man who never lifted a sword and never wanted a throne. While his brother conquered cities and his friends marched to war, he sat in a private room asking an old woman to tell him everything. He wrote it down, word for word, until he was sure that if she died, nothing would be lost. His name was Urwa ibn az-Zubayr, and he is the bridge between the household of the Prophet ﷺ and the rest of the world.

To understand him, you have to meet the family that produced him, because it was a family that seemed to specialise in two things: martyrdom, and prayer.

Born among the martyrs

His father was az-Zubayr ibn al-Awwam (may Allah be pleased with him), one of the ten promised Paradise, the disciple of the Prophet ﷺ, killed while at prayer. His mother was Asma bint Abi Bakr (may Allah be pleased with her), and his grandfather was Abu Bakr himself. Through one line ran Hamza, the lion of Allah; through another ran the marriage ties that bound the family to the

Prophet ﷺ. Urwa carried in his blood nearly every great name of the first generation.

There was a pattern in that house worth pausing over. The Prophet ﷺ had named all of his children after the prophets before him. Az-Zubayr did something different. He named every one of his sons after a martyr, as if he wanted them to wake each morning to a name that reminded them what a life was for.

Urwa was born into chaos, most likely in the year twenty-three after the Hijra, at the close of the rule of Umar and the dawn of the rule of Uthman. He was not a companion of the Prophet ﷺ. He was a Tabi'i, of the generation that came after, and he grew up watching the first Muslim civil war tear through the world he had inherited. His earliest memory was of fear. Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him) was under siege in his own home, and a man among the rebels climbed in on a plank to kill him. Urwa, a small boy, watched his elder brother Abdullah rush the man and strike him down at the very door, and shouted out in pride, "My brother killed him, my brother killed him." The besiegers turned on him, stripped his clothes, and were about to beat him, until they saw he had not yet reached puberty, and left him alone.

This was the world he was raised in: the loneliness and violence of men, and above it all the courage of his brother, who became his hero. And yet, when the great battles came, Urwa would not take that road. Turned away from the Battle of the Camel for being too young, he later said plainly, "I chose scholarship over battle. This was my path." His brother had the path of the warrior. He would have a different one.

The boy who chose to dream of knowledge

There is a famous scene of four young men sitting near the Kaaba, dreaming aloud about their futures. Three were sons of the family, and the fourth was Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, who would one day rule the whole empire. One said, "I will be the leader of the two sanctuaries, Makkah and Madinah." Another said, "I will govern the two Iraqs." Abd al-Malik said, "As for me, I will rule it all." And Urwa, when it came to him, said only this: "I will take knowledge, and keep away from all of that." The narrator adds a striking note: every one of them received exactly what he had asked for.

The lesson of that scene is not really about ambition. It is about a young man who looked at thrones and armies and chose, deliberately, the thing that does not glitter. Urwa's father had pressed this on his children while they were small. "You may be the young ones among your people today, but one day you will be their elders," he told them. "And what good is an old man if he is ignorant?" Do not wait until life is half spent to begin. Figure it out while you are young, and Allah will raise you to an honourable place.

That is precisely what happened. Urwa loved the gatherings of knowledge the way other young men loved status and gold. There was not a companion narrating from the Prophet ﷺ, nor a circle of learning in any mosque he could reach, whether in Madinah or later in Egypt and Iraq, except that Urwa was in the front row, listening, gathering, writing down whatever he could hold. He had one interest, and he gave himself to it without reserve.

The room behind the curtain

But Urwa had one advantage no one else possessed, and from it so much of Islamic history flows. The inner life of the Prophet ﷺ

did not come down to us from a mosque in Baghdad or a council of scholars in Syria. It came from conversations between a nephew and his aunt.

His aunt was Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), the wife of the Prophet ﷺ and the mother of the believers. The young students of Madinah would learn from all the companions, but when they wished to ask Aisha something, they had to seek permission and sit behind a curtain. Urwa simply walked into her house. He entered freely, every single day, and asked her about everything that had ever happened between her and the Prophet ﷺ.

And he meant everything. She would take him to the exact spot where the Prophet ﷺ used to stand in prayer through the night, show him where the Prophet ﷺ lay down to rest and where she lay beside him, where her feet reached and where his blessed head came to rest. He once mentioned a narration that the Prophet ﷺ kissed one of his wives and then went to pray without renewing his ablution, and Aisha smiled and said, in effect, "And who would it have been but you?" So she lovingly handed him the life of the Prophet ﷺ one memory at a time, and Urwa memorised and wrote, memorised and wrote.

He learned more than narrations from her. He once came to her house and found her standing in her place of prayer, reciting a single verse over and over, weeping and making supplication. The verse spoke of Allah's mercy in saving the believers from punishment:

God has been gracious to us and saved us from the torment of intense heat

QUR'AN 52:27

She would not move past it. So he went out to the market, bought what he needed, dropped it home, and returned. He found her in the very same place, reciting the very same verse, still weeping, still calling upon her Lord. That was the school he was raised in, and the woman whose knowledge he absorbed unlike any other human being.

His devotion was so complete that he later said something extraordinary. Four years before Aisha passed away, he realised that if she were to die that day, he would be content, because he had already memorised every hadith she carried, not missing a single one. "If I die," he would say, "I am satisfied that knowledge will not be lost on my account."

A man dedicated to one thing

Urwa was strategic even in marriage, and for one reason only: knowledge. He married a daughter of Abdullah ibn Ja'far for access to one wellspring of narration, and into the family of Salman for another. Every relationship in his life was built upon learning. He collected and collected, from Abdullah ibn Abbas, from al-Husayn, from one companion after another, never tiring of it.

So the day came when the great scholar Ibn Shihab az-Zuhri, the first man officially commissioned to gather the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ in writing, came to Urwa and said, "I found him to be an ocean without shores. I never met a man like him." It was Urwa's work, set down patiently year after year, that became the foundation of the written history of Islam. He is rightly called the pioneer, the first compiler of the biography of the Prophet ﷺ. The earliest manuscripts of the seerah we possess are, in fact, letters Urwa wrote answering questions about the faith and the

life of the Messenger ﷺ. Every later historian you have heard of drew, in the end, from him.

What is most moving is how he came to receive his brother's sword. After the long wars had ended, after Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr had been killed, Abd al-Malik, now ruler of all, wished to make peace with what remained of the family he had grown up beside. He summoned Urwa and brought out the sword Abdullah had once carried into battle. "Do you recognise this sword?" he asked. "I do," said Urwa. "What marks are on it?" Urwa answered, "This mark is from the Battle of Badr, and these two are from Uhud." And the ruler handed the sword back to the family. Urwa took no governorship, no rank. He took only the place that was truly his: the scholar to whom even the ruler wrote his questions.

He once said a sentence that explains his whole life. "It may be that a word of humiliation I bore with patience won me lasting honour in the sight of Allah." He could have grasped at power or revenge. Instead he kept himself far from every civil war and quarrel, and gave his days to spreading the knowledge of the Prophet ﷺ wherever he could reach. Because he let it all go, his transmission of the seerah became the most authoritative in the world.

He even wrote his own books of jurisprudence and then, on a day of trial, burned them. He regretted it afterward, saying that to have them back would have been more beloved to him than his family and his wealth. Some scholars say he burned them out of fear that his own opinions might one day be imposed on the community as binding law, the same humility that later moved Imam Malik to refuse when offered the chance to make his book

the single law of the land. Who am I, such men asked, that the people should be bound to me?

Four limbs, and Allah took one

He carried habits that the rest of us can only look at with longing. He read a quarter of the Qur'an every day from the written text, then stood at night and recited that same quarter from memory in prayer. There was no night he abandoned that habit, not even the worst night of his life. He fasted nearly every day of the year, breaking only on the two days of Eid. And his charity ran against the grain of human nature. The Qur'an tells of the people of the garden who schemed to harvest all their fruit before any poor person could take a share, and were ruined for it. Urwa wanted to be their opposite. When his dates and fruit ripened, he tore open the walls of his garden and called the people in to take what they wished, and Allah kept increasing his harvest year after year. "Good deeds have sisters," he used to teach, "and sins have sisters." Do one good thing, and others follow it; do one evil thing, and it brings its siblings along.

Then came the journey that most people have heard of without knowing whose journey it was. Urwa set out for Syria to visit Abd al-Malik, taking one of his sons with him. On the road something bit his leg, and a poison spread through it. By the time he arrived, the leg had turned colours, and gangrene had set in. The physicians told him plainly: the leg must come off, or the poison will reach the rest of you, and you will die.

There was no anaesthetic in that age. The way men dulled such pain was wine, and they urged him to drink until he could no longer feel what was being done. He refused. "There is no cure," he said, "that comes through what Allah has forbidden." So he gave them his own answer. "Wait until I pray, and while I am

praying, take the leg." He waited until he was deep in prostration, his focus furthest from this world, and that is when they brought the saw. They cut the leg off while he was in his prayer, and the only sound that escaped him was a single faint grimace. He did not scream. He did not break his prayer.

Pause on this family for a moment. His father az-Zubayr was killed while praying. His brother Abdullah was killed while praying before the Kaaba. And now Urwa loses his leg in the middle of prayer and barely makes a sound. What kind of prayer did these people pray? Something in the training of az-Zubayr and Asma had built it into their children.

And then, as if Allah meant to test the whole of him at once, on that very journey the son he had brought along was playing near the horses, and a horse kicked him in the face and killed him. So while Urwa was still being bandaged, still learning to move with one leg gone, they had to tell him his child was dead.

A messenger came to console him for the leg. Urwa answered, "Praise be to Allah. I had four limbs, and He took one and left me three." Then they came about his son, and his words were the same. He turned it into a supplication authentically preserved from him: "O Allah, I had four limbs, You took one and left me three. I had four sons, You took one and left me three. If You have taken, You have surely given; if You have tested, You have surely blessed. I have no complaint against You." Someone came to comfort him and said, "Glad tidings to you. Your son has gone ahead of you to Paradise, and it may be that your leg has gone ahead of you there too."

Not long after, a man came to him and said: I was once the richest of people, with wealth and children and everything a man could want. Then a flood swept away my whole family and all my

wealth, leaving only one camel and one child. While I ran to save the camel, the wolves fell upon my child and devoured him, and then the camel kicked me in the face and I went blind. The man had been sent so that Urwa would know that however heavy his burden, someone else carried heavier, and the answer to it was the same praise of Allah.

The valley, the well, and the last fast

In his later years Urwa used to sit every night after the prayer with Ali ibn al-Husayn, the great-grandson of the Prophet ﷺ and another giant of that generation. One night they spoke of the injustice of one of the governors and their helplessness to change it, and Urwa recalled a teaching: that whoever leaves the company of oppressors, whom Allah knows to hate their oppression, may be spared the punishment that falls on them. So he withdrew. He left the mosque of the Prophet ﷺ in Madinah and moved out to the valley of al-Aqiq, where he built a home that still stands today.

People mocked him, saying he had gone off to build a palace and abandon the city. He answered that he had seen their gatherings full of distraction, their markets full of backbiting, indecency loose in their streets, and had left all of it to flee the trial and seek the safety of Allah. There in the valley he dug a well, and the books record that there was no water in the land sweeter than the water of Urwa's well.

He died on a Friday in the year ninety-four after the Hijra, a year so heavy with the deaths of scholars that it came to be called the Year of the Jurists, and Urwa was reckoned among the most knowledgeable of all who passed. On the day he was dying he was fasting, as was his lifelong way. His family, seeing how ill and old he was, begged him to break the fast and drink something.

He told them he had a feeling he would break his fast on the water of Paradise. And just before the day ended, holding to his fast to the last, he passed away on the outskirts of Madinah.

He left behind no kingdom and no conquest. He left behind something the kingdoms could not: the inside view of the most beautiful life ever lived, carried out of a quiet room and handed, intact, to everyone after him.

What Urwa's life asks of our faith

It is easy to admire a man like Urwa and leave it there, to call him a great scholar and turn the page. That would miss what his life is asking of us. He is not a monument. He is a question put to our own iman.

Start with the choice he made as a young man, sitting near the Kaaba while others dreamed of thrones. He chose to spend his youth gathering knowledge of his Lord and the way of His Messenger ﷺ instead of chasing the things the world claps for. His father's words wait there for each of us: you are the young ones today, but one day you will be the elders, and what good is an old man who is ignorant? The quality to imitate is the courage to give your best years to Allah now, while it is hard and unglamorous, rather than promising yourself you will get serious about your faith once life calms down. It never calms down. Learn your religion, build your prayer, turn toward Allah in the years you actually have.

Then look at how he bore loss. A leg cut off without anaesthetic, in the middle of his prostration, and his only response was praise. A beloved son killed on the same journey, and his words were, "If You have taken, You have surely given; if You have tested, You have surely blessed; I have no complaint against You." This is

contentment with the decree of Allah, rida, and it does not descend on a person by accident. It was built, night after night, by a man who stood in prayer over a quarter of the Qur'an, who fasted nearly every day, who had trained his heart for years to belong to Allah before the test ever came. When your own hardship arrives, and it will, his life asks whether you have been building that heart in the easy days, so that it holds in the hard ones.

And notice the shape of his whole life. He let the world go. He bore humiliation in patience, kept far from every fight that would have flattered his pride, asked for no rank, and burned his own books rather than risk imposing himself on others. He worked in the background and let his brother have the glory and the throne. By every worldly measure he chose the smaller life. Yet it was Urwa, not the rulers beside him, whose work still reaches into your hands every time you learn how the Prophet ﷺ lived. This is the promise hidden in his story: what you do quietly for Allah, with no one watching and no name attached, is not lost. He sees it, He keeps it, and He may make it outlast everything the powerful built.

So take one thing from him into an ordinary day. Give an hour you would have spent on something forgettable to learning your faith, for the sake of Allah. Do one act of worship in private that no one will ever know about, the way he stood in the dark over his Qur'an. And the next time something is taken from you, before you complain, try his words: praise be to Allah, who left me so much more than He took. That is how the first Muslim historian lived, in sincerity and patience and quiet trust, and it is a way still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Urwa ibn az-Zubayr, raise us upon a measure of his devotion, and let us meet our Lord, as he did, turned toward Him.

This chapter follows the account of Urwa ibn az-Zubayr (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (52:27). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr

The Last Martyr Standing

There are lives you can read once and set down, and there are lives that follow you out of the room. The life of Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr (may Allah be pleased with him) is one of the second kind. He was born in struggle and he died in struggle, and in between he was perhaps the most fearless man of his generation: a man who answered tyrants without lowering his eyes, and who, when the stones of his city rained down on him, would set down his sword to pray and not move when the masonry grazed his beard. His story does not end the way a child wants a story to end. It ends with an old man, alone, killed in prayer in front of the Kaaba. And yet, when you reach that ending, it does not feel like defeat. It feels like the most important thing that can be said about a human life. He understood, before the end, that we are not bodies. We are souls, and our souls are with Allah.

To understand how a man becomes that, you have to begin with the family that made him.

The bloodline of sacrifice

It is hard to think of another companion who could be placed at the center of such a family tree, where every branch carries a story of sacrifice for the sake of Allah. His grandfather was Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), the first adult man to

believe, the truest human being to walk the earth after the prophets, the one who affirmed the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ through thick and thin. Abdullah was named after him and carried the kunya Abu Bakr as well. And of all the companions, it was Abdullah who most resembled Abu Bakr in his very face and frame, the way al-Hasan and al-Husayn resembled the Prophet ﷺ.

His mother was Asma bint Abi Bakr (may Allah be pleased with her), the woman of the two waist belts, whose courage shone in everyone she touched, who stood before one tyrant after another and feared none of them. His father was az-Zubayr ibn al-Awwam (may Allah be pleased with him), among the very first to believe, the first man to draw a sword for the sake of Allah when he heard a rumor that the Prophet ﷺ had been attacked, and the one of whom the Prophet ﷺ said that every prophet has a disciple, and his disciple was az-Zubayr. His grandmother was Safiyyah bint Abd al-Muttalib (may Allah be pleased with her), the aunt of the Prophet ﷺ, a single mother who feared no one but Allah. And Hamza (may Allah be pleased with him), the lion of Allah and master of the martyrs, was his great-uncle. Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her) was kin to him too, through his father's side.

Loyalty, eloquence, worship, valor, the readiness to put everything on the line: all of it ran in his veins at once. He would inherit something of each of them, and in time he would name his children after them, keeping the whole lineage of sacrifice alive in his own house.

Born under a tyrant's shadow

Even before he was born, the struggle had already claimed him. His parents began their marriage with nothing, az-Zubayr owning

only a horse and a camel, Asma grinding the dates and carrying the date-stones on her own head across long distances. They were among those who fled to Abyssinia, refugees in a strange land before they had settled into being newlyweds. And then came the Hijra to Madinah.

Asma was heavily pregnant with Abdullah, near her term, when she carried food up the mountains of Makkah to the Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr in the cave, coordinating their secret flight. And on that road she was caught by Abu Jahl, the Pharaoh of this ummah, a huge man who stood over this pregnant woman and demanded to know where her father was. When she refused, he struck her across the face so hard that her earring flew loose. A blow like that, in her condition, could have ended both of them. But for reasons known only to Allah, the man who had killed others held back his hand and left her. And so Abdullah lived. The child who would grow into the most fearless of men had his first experience of the world from inside the womb of a woman who would not break before a tyrant.

When she finally reached Quba, exhausted, and gave birth, it was into a community in fear. Some among the tribes of Madinah had boasted that they had cast a spell on the Muslims so that no child would be born to them, and months had passed with no baby born to the migrants. Then Abdullah came, the first child of the migration, and the meaning of it was not lost on anyone.

They brought him to the Prophet ﷺ, who took him into his lap, chewed a date, and rubbed it on the roof of the newborn's mouth. So the first thing ever to enter the stomach of Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr was the blessed saliva of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, who made supplication for him and gave him his name. And then Abu Bakr lifted his grandson high and carried him through

the streets, calling out "Allahu akbar," and the Muslims poured out behind him answering "Allahu akbar," because here was the proof that the curse was empty, that the people of the Prophet ﷺ had been given life. The first human voice to call the adhan into the ear of this child was the voice of Abu Bakr, the man whose declaration of faith no follower could ever match.

A child whose first word was "sword"

The signs were there before he could walk. Other infants babble for their mother or father; Abdullah's first word, it is reported, was sayf, sword. While other children fashioned toys out of dirt, he carved wooden swords and went out to shadow his father at play. His memory and speech came astonishingly early; Bukhari records hadith he narrated of things he witnessed when he was three, an age from which almost no one keeps such recollection.

And there is the strange and famous incident of the cupping. The Prophet ﷺ had blood drawn and told the boy, no more than seven or eight, to go and dispose of it. When the Prophet ﷺ later asked what he had done with it, he answered that he had put it where no one would ever find it. The Prophet ﷺ looked at him and asked, did you drink it? The child lowered his head and said yes, O Messenger of Allah. It was not commanded, and it is not for us to follow. But the response of the Prophet ﷺ has echoed down through the books: woe to you from the people, and woe to the people from you. Those who knew him later attributed the almost unnatural strength of his body to that moment.

He was, in truth, az-Zubayr in miniature: the same towering build, the same temperament, the same fearlessness. At around eight he was brought to give his pledge of allegiance to the Prophet ﷺ, walking up like a little man and putting his small hand into the

hand of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, who smiled at the sight of him.

His memories of those early years were memories of struggle, every one. He remembered being hidden with his grandmother Safiyyah during the Battle of the Trench when an enemy soldier slipped in and the man guarding them froze; Safiyyah seized a pole, struck the intruder dead, and hurled his body out so the enemy would think an army waited within. He remembered seeing his father charge through the lines, and his father later telling him what the Prophet ﷺ had said that day: may my mother and father be sacrificed for you, words the Prophet ﷺ said to almost no one. This was the air the boy breathed. He grew up watching the rank his family held with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and the longing for that rank was planted in him young.

Bravery, worship, and the stillness of a pole

Three things, it was said, could not be competed with in Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr: his bravery, his worship, and his eloquence.

His courage announced itself before he was grown. There is the story of him as a boy of about ten, playing in the road when Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) came walking. Umar was so imposing that grown men, not only children, would take another path rather than cross his. The children scattered. Abdullah stood his ground. When Umar asked why he had not run like the others, the boy answered that he had done nothing wrong that he should flee, and the road was not so narrow that the two of them could not share it. And Umar, far from angered, picked him up and embraced him: this is the son of his father, just like az-Zubayr. He carried that confidence, never arrogance, into everything, and he feared no one and nothing but Allah, as true at seventy as it had been at ten.

He was too young to fight beside the Prophet ﷺ, but his father took him out to the great battles that followed, setting the boy on a horse at Yarmuk so he could witness it, acclimating him to the dust of war. When the campaigns reached North Africa, Abdullah came into his own. In one battle the Muslims faced an enemy many times their number, and the opposing commander offered a fortune and his daughter in marriage to whoever would kill the Muslim leader. Abdullah asked for thirty men to guard his back, then walked straight up to the enemy commander, seated on a throne and fanned by attendants. Asked what he wanted, he answered plainly that he had come to kill him, and he did, and the cry of "Allahu akbar" from his thirty men sent the vast army into flight. He inherited his father's sword, the same blade az-Zubayr had carried at Badr, still dented from that day, and it was the sword he would die holding decades later.

But the warrior was outmatched by the worshipper. Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) said that whoever wished to follow the prayer of the Prophet ﷺ should look to the prayer of Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr. When he stood to pray he became as still as a wooden post, so motionless that birds would settle on him, and one of his names became "the pigeon of the masjid." That stillness was the prayer of his grandfather Abu Bakr, living again in him. Once, while he prayed, a snake fell upon one of his children and the whole house erupted in screaming, and he did not break his prayer; afterward he asked only whether he had heard some noise. And he was among the youth chosen, when Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him) ordered the standardization of the Qur'an, to write and certify the manuscripts.

The keeper of the Kaaba

He lived into the time of fitna, the tribulations that tore the ummah after the rightly guided successors. When the household of Uthman was besieged, Abdullah fought to defend him and took twenty-six wounds, wounds he later said he hoped would count among his greatest deeds with Allah.

As the chaos deepened, Abdullah took his stand. He refused to give his pledge to a ruler he saw as illegitimate, and he established himself in Makkah while al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him) went toward Iraq. He could not be made to bow to tyranny. He fought off a first siege of the city, pitching tents around the sacred House for the wounded and leading its defense. When that siege broke, his authority spread until his caliphate became the dominant one in the Muslim world, acknowledged across most of the lands, coins struck in his name, most of the surviving companions living under his care. He governed with the nobility you would expect of him.

Alone before the Kaaba

But the fitna would not rest. A tyrant named al-Hajjaj brought an army to Makkah and laid the city under siege for some four months, careless of the sanctity of the place, careless even of the season of Hajj. He cut off the food until the people starved, and he launched stones at the Kaaba and at Abdullah's people. When his own men flinched, asking what would happen if they struck the House, he waved it away, even when lightning struck their catapults and killed dozens of them. The food ran out, the water ran out, and there was only Zamzam to keep them alive, until the people grew so weak they could barely lift their swords.

Through all of it, Abdullah, now in his seventies, was the strongest fighter among them, as though age had never touched him. When the time for prayer came, he would put down his

sword and pray. Once a piece of the Kaaba's masonry, struck loose by a catapult, flew between his beard and his throat and nearly killed him, and he did not move. His clothes caught fire and the people put it out, and still he stayed in his prayer. Then he would take up the sword again. His ten thousand fled, little by little, until he stood alone.

And here comes the heaviest conversation our tradition holds. His mother Asma was a hundred years old, still alive, still in Makkah, suffering with the rest. The old warrior went to her, embattled and abandoned, and she dressed some of his wounds with her own hands. He told her the people had betrayed him, that the enemy was offering him the whole of this world if he would only submit, and he asked what she thought he should do. She did not flinch. She told him that if he knew he was upon the truth, then he must stay upon it, for his companions had been killed upon that truth, and he must not hand his neck to these men to be toyed with. To be struck down by a sword in dignity, she said, is better than a hundred lashes in humiliation. He confessed his fear that they would mutilate his body, that they would crucify him. And she answered with words that ought never to be forgotten: a sheep does not feel the skinning after the slaughter.

She felt the armor on him and said that what he was seeking no longer needed it; let it go. Instead, tighten your waist belt, she said, so that nothing of you is exposed if you fall. He kissed her head and her hands and her feet, and asked her never to stop praying for him, in his life or after his death. And she raised her hands and said, O Allah, I have submitted him to Your command, and I am pleased with Your decree. She asked Allah to have mercy on him for the long nights he had spent standing in prayer,

weeping in the darkness, for his long days of fasting, for his kindness to his parents.

Then he took his last bath, put on his perfume, and went out to the Kaaba to fight his final fight. He was seventy-three years old, facing an army by himself. One man stayed at his side to the end, a man who had once fled the battlefield at Madinah and could not live with the shame of it, who said now that a free man does not flee twice. Abdullah fought until the time of prayer came, and then he stopped to pray, and as he prayed they stoned the back of his head, and they killed him there, in front of the Kaaba.

The strangeness of that moment is almost unbearable: the men who killed him had the nerve to shout "Allahu akbar" over his body, the very words called out in joy when Abu Bakr carried him as a newborn through the streets of Madinah. But it was Abdullah who had the last word. Al-Hajjaj, wanting to make an example of him, crucified his lifeless body before the House. And it kept going wrong for the tyrant. A sweet fragrance, a clean musk, rose from the body of the slain man, so beautiful that those who had killed him began to regret it, and the dead cat they tied to him to mask it did nothing. Companions asked that the body be brought down; al-Hajjaj refused until the mother should come and beg him.

She came. When a man reminded her gently that these are only bodies, and the souls are what is with Allah, she answered that she understood it well: a prophet of Allah, Yahya, had been beheaded and his head carried to a wicked woman. And she looked at her crucified son and said, is it not time for this horseman to be brought down? Public revulsion turned against al-Hajjaj, and at last the body was lowered. And then Allah honored her in the very way she had asked. She had not wanted

to die until she saw her son granted either martyrdom or victory; he was granted martyrdom, and about two weeks later she died a natural death, the two of them carried out of this world almost together.

What Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr's life asks of our faith

It is easy, with a life like this, to be moved only by the courage and leave it at that. But the gift of his story is not about character. It is about where we put our hope. At the end of everything, the lesson he leaves us is one sentence: these bodies are nothing; it is the souls that are with Allah.

His was a community that nearly lost its faith over his death. People looked at a man of such worship and such truth, killed in prayer and hung up before the Kaaba, and asked how Allah could allow it. Some abandoned the very belief in divine decree. That is the road that opens up when we measure Allah's promise by what our eyes can see, when we expect the truth to be rewarded with safety in this world. Abdullah's life closes that road. He was upon the truth, and the truth cost him his blood, and he was, by every measure that finally matters, the most successful man in Makkah that day. What looked like a slaughtered old man abandoned by everyone was a soul rising sweet as musk to its Lord while the tyrant choked on his own cruelty.

So the quality to take from him is not merely bravery, though we could use more of it. It is contentment with the decree of Allah, the contentment his mother spoke aloud over him: I have submitted him to Your command, and I am pleased with Your decree. That sentence is the highest reach of faith, and most of us are far from it. We are pleased with Allah when the outcome is what we wanted, and we quietly accuse Him when it is not. Asma was a hundred years old, she had buried more than most of us

ever will, and she sent her last son out to die rather than see him bow, and she called it pleasure with her Lord. To believe like that is to know in your bones that this world is not the place of reward, that the soul outlasts the body, and that nothing given to Allah is ever lost.

Bring it down to an ordinary day. You will not likely be asked to stand alone against an army. But you will be asked to choose between a small dignity for the sake of Allah and an easy comfort that costs you a piece of your truth. You will face loss you did not choose: sickness, disappointment, the failure of people you counted on. Abdullah's life asks whether, in those moments, your trust in Allah is anchored deep enough to hold when the things you thought you needed are taken away. So do one concrete thing for Allah today, in private, the way he prayed in the dark while the world slept. Hold to one truth that is inconvenient. Keep a prayer still when the noise around you is loudest. And when something is taken from you, say with your whole heart that you are pleased with His decree, and mean it. Remember that you are not your circumstances, not your losses, not even your body. You are a soul, and your soul is on its way to Allah.

May Allah be pleased with Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr, the last to stand and the first to set down his sword for prayer, and with his mother Asma and his whole house of sacrifice. May He grant us a measure of their contentment with His decree, anchor our hearts in His promise when our eyes can see no reason to hope, and let us be gathered among those whose souls rise sweet to Him.

This chapter follows the account of Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr (may Allah be pleased with him) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). It quotes no Qur'anic verse directly, as

the lecture cites none; where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abdullah ibn Umar

The Living Sunnah

Imagine a man walking through the streets of Madinah with his eyes fixed on the ground. He is not lost. He is watching his own feet. He is trying to set them down exactly where, decades earlier, he had once seen the feet of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ fall. He stops at a tree no one else would notice and pours water at its roots, because he remembers the Prophet ﷺ sitting under it once, and he cannot bear for it to die. He passes a particular door of the mosque and refuses to enter, because he heard the Prophet ﷺ say one day, near the end of his life, that he wished he had reserved that door for the women. The Prophet ﷺ never lived to make the rule. It did not matter. This man heard the wish, and the wish became law in his own body.

If you saw him following the footsteps of the Prophet ﷺ with this kind of care, you might have thought he was a man losing his mind. He was, in truth, a man who had found the one thing worth holding onto and refused to ever let it go. His name was Abdullah ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), and the people of his time used to make a strange and beautiful supplication: that Allah keep Abdullah ibn Umar alive as long as they lived, so that the sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ would not disappear from their sight.

A copy of his father, a shadow of the Prophet ﷺ

He was born about a year after the Prophet ﷺ received revelation, around the year 611, into a house that was, at the time, hostile to everything the Prophet ﷺ stood for. His father was Umar ibn al-Khattab, who would one day become one of the greatest of all the companions, but who in those early years was still an enemy of Islam. The boy grew up watching his father cross over from the fiercest opposition to the deepest devotion.

He looked exactly like his father. Of all of Umar's children, Abdullah resembled him the most: the same towering height, the same imposing presence, the same dignity. And just as he was a copy of Umar, he became, in his own quiet way, a copy of the Prophet ﷺ. The way his hand moved, the way he walked, what he wore, all of it became an embodiment of the sunnah. To look at him was to be reminded of two men at once: the father whom Madinah missed terribly after his death, and the Messenger ﷺ whom they missed even more.

He was too young to fight at Badr. He presented himself at Uhud when he was fourteen, and although he was a giant of a boy, the Prophet ﷺ sent him home. He came again at the Battle of the Trench when he was fifteen, and this time the Prophet ﷺ allowed him to take his place among the men. It is said that of all the youth who grew up around the Prophet ﷺ, none was more disciplined and devoted than Abdullah.

The hand on the shoulder

The defining moment of his life came not on a battlefield but in an ordinary instant of nearness. One day the Prophet ﷺ placed his hand on the young man's shoulder, pulled him gently to the side, and said words that would shape the rest of his days:

He told him to be in this world as though he were a stranger, or someone merely passing through. And Abdullah took that advice and built his entire life around it. He would later add, remembering the Prophet's ﷺ words, that if you reach the evening, do not expect to see the morning, and if you reach the morning, do not expect to see the evening; take from your health before your sickness, and from your life before your death.

He embraced being the stranger, living by a standard most people would find too severe, the seriousness of a young man who understood that this life is short and the meeting with Allah is certain.

His love for the Prophet ﷺ expressed itself in a hunger to simply be near him, a longing for reasons to speak with him. Knowing that the companions shared their dreams with the Prophet ﷺ in the mornings, Abdullah used to hope for a good dream of his own, just so he would have a reason to approach the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. When he finally saw a dream, of two angels saving him from the Fire, he was too embarrassed to tell the Prophet ﷺ himself and asked his sister Hafsa to relay it. The Prophet ﷺ said what an excellent man Abdullah was, and added only that he should pray something of the night. From that night on, his son Salim tells us, Abdullah ibn Umar never again slept through a full night until he died.

That is the kind of man he was. One gentle suggestion from the Prophet ﷺ, and it reorganized his entire life. He was so afraid of doing anything to displease the Messenger of Allah ﷺ that once, when his unruly camel kept pushing ahead of the Prophet's ﷺ mount on a journey, he was mortified, certain he looked like an arrogant boy. The Prophet ﷺ stopped, bought the camel from

Umar, called Abdullah over, and made him a gift of it. Don't worry, he was being told. It is alright.

The man who counted the grey hairs

What grew in him from all of this was a devotion to the sunnah unlike anyone before or since. As Abdullah ibn Abbas loved the Qur'an, so Abdullah ibn Umar loved the way of the Prophet ﷺ. He counted the grey hairs in the Prophet's ﷺ beard and could point to exactly where each one was. He prayed in every spot he had ever seen the Prophet ﷺ pray, scented himself with what the Prophet ﷺ used, and wore his hair to his earlobes because that is how the Prophet's ﷺ hair fell. He narrated over two thousand hadith, and the one who knew him best, his freed servant Nafi, said that Abdullah never once spoke of the Prophet ﷺ without his eyes filling with tears.

His care extended to every word. Where another narrator might preserve the meaning of a hadith while changing a word here or there, Abdullah ibn Umar would not add a single word nor drop one. And his transmission carried a feature found with no other companion: again and again, after reporting what the Prophet ﷺ did, the report ends with the words, "and Abdullah used to do it too." If anyone ever wondered what the Prophet ﷺ truly meant, the answer was simple: look at what Ibn Umar does.

Yet his adherence was never extremism. He was as quick to correct exaggeration as he was to correct neglect. When a man stretched and distorted the call to prayer to make it sound beautiful, Abdullah was troubled, because that was not how the Prophet ﷺ called the prayer. When people would faint dramatically while reciting the Qur'an, he noted that the companions, who were moved more deeply than anyone, did not

behave that way. His rule was to follow the Prophet ﷺ exactly: not too far to one side, not too far to the other.

Sincerity that would not even sip water

He understood that an act done for Allah can be quietly ruined by the smallest crack in the intention, and he guarded that intention like treasure. When he went to a certain mosque to pray, where it was said that whoever prays there seeking only the pleasure of Allah leaves forgiven, he would not even take a sip of water inside it, unwilling to let any comfort mix into an act he meant for Allah alone.

This was a man whose night was spent in prayer and whose day was spent in fasting. When he read the words of his Lord, they fell heavy on him:

Is it not time for believers to humble their hearts to the remembrance of God and the Truth that has been revealed, and not to be like those who received the Scripture before them, whose time was extended but whose hearts hardened and many of whom were lawbreakers?

QUR'AN 57:16

He would weep at this verse until he could read no further. He observed that the first generation of this ummah might memorize only a few short chapters, but those chapters were weighty upon them, and they feared to meet Allah having failed to act on a single verse they knew. The last of this ummah, he warned, would find the Qur'an light and easy, reciting all of it without pausing to reflect on one word of it.

His fear of Allah lived in the smallest moments. Nafi tells us that once Abdullah asked for a cup of water, began to drink, and

suddenly wept. Asked why, he said he had remembered that the people of the Fire would crave nothing so much as a sip of water. A cup of water in his hand turned his heart toward the Day of Judgment. He was, in his own estimation, a man unsure of his own salvation, exactly as his father had been, despite a life that made others certain of where he was going.

The son at his father's deathbed

His relationship with his father was its own quiet education. Umar refused him any privilege for being his son; if anything, he held him to a harder standard. When Umar set the pensions of the early emigrants, he gave his own son less than the rest, because Abdullah had come to Madinah as a child carried by his parents, not on his own migration. When he saw that his son owned a fine, well-fed camel, he told him to sell it and give the proceeds away. Umar taught all his children that the family of the Khalifah does not eat its fill while the ummah goes hungry.

He also taught Abdullah a principle that would define him: when the word of the Prophet ﷺ is clear, no one's opinion overrides it, not even a father's. Once a man objected that Umar had forbidden something the Prophet ﷺ had permitted, and Abdullah answered plainly, asking whether the command of this religion is to follow his father or to follow the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He loved and revered his father, but the word of the Prophet ﷺ came first. Years later his own son Salim would do the same, explaining that this was simply how the family of Umar was raised.

So it fell to Abdullah to sit with his father in his final hours, after Umar was stabbed, holding him as he gave his last instructions while the blood seeped from his wounds. Umar's first concern was his debt; he asked his son to pay it from his own property, so

that he would meet Allah owing nothing to anyone. Then he gave Abdullah a delicate mission: go to Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), and do not call me the Commander of the Believers, but say only that Umar asks her permission to be buried beside his two companions, the Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr. He was stripping away his title before his Lord at the very end. Aisha had reserved that spot for herself, and she gave it up, saying she preferred Umar to herself. When Abdullah brought back the answer, the dying man said that nothing in this world had mattered more to him than that.

The man who would not chase position

When Umar died, some of the companions saw an obvious path forward: appoint his son, the living image of him, who carried his father's sincerity and asceticism and justice. Umar refused absolutely. He would not have the leadership become a family inheritance. When they pressed him about his own son, he said it was enough for one man of the family of al-Khattab to bear this burden. Abdullah could advise the council he appointed, but he could never be the Khalifah himself.

And this suited Abdullah, who wanted no position at all. He fought in the great campaigns, in Iraq and Persia and Egypt, but he never took office, not even as a judge. When he was offered a judgeship, he described its danger: a judge either rules in ignorance and is ruined, or is carried away by his desire and is ruined, or strives and is right and merely breaks even. He wanted no part of that risk, sought refuge in Allah from the appointment, and was excused.

When civil strife, the fitna, broke out among the Muslims, his entire life became a careful withdrawal from it. He would tell those who called him to it that if they called him to prayer, he

would come; if they called him to fight the enemies of Allah, he would come; but if they called him to raise his sword against other Muslims, they should leave him alone in his house. Yet his silence was never the silence of a man hiding his convictions. Everyone knew exactly where Abdullah ibn Umar stood on oppression. When the grandson of the Prophet ﷺ, Husayn, was killed, and the people of Iraq came asking him petty questions about religious law, he told them they had shed the blood of the beloved of the Prophet ﷺ and now came asking him about the blood of mosquitoes. When a tyrant spoke after spilling sacred blood in the sanctuary of Allah, Abdullah addressed him publicly as an enemy of Allah. He refused to fight, but he refused just as firmly to be silent about the truth, and in the end a corrupt ruler had him quietly poisoned. The strongest position in his society, it turned out, was simply to speak with principle and never be bought.

Over a thousand freed, and a stranger to the end

Through all of it, his hands were always open. He lived in such simplicity that the price of everything in his house combined would not have equalled the price of a fine garment, and he said he had not eaten his fill since the day he became a Muslim. Yet wealth flowed through him to others without ever sticking to him: he would receive thousands of dirhams from an emissary, and the next day be buying fodder for his camel on credit, having given it all away for the sake of Allah. By the end of his life, he had freed over a thousand slaves with his own wealth, and he loved especially to free the righteous among them, those who came early to the prayer in the front row hoping he would notice them. When Nafi warned him that some were only pretending

piety to win their freedom, Abdullah laughed and said to let them deceive him for the sake of Allah; he did not care.

His generosity was almost reckless in its tenderness. Sick in bed, longing for the fish his wife had prepared, he gave the whole dish to a beggar at the door, and gave it again when the beggar returned. He would not sit to a meal unless an orphan shared it with him. And he loved the kind of word that revealed a sincere heart. Testing a shepherd once, he urged him to sell one of his master's sheep and tell the owner a wolf had eaten it. The shepherd answered, "And what would I say to Allah?" Abdullah was so moved that he sought out the man's master, bought his freedom on the spot, and prayed that the words that freed him in this world would free him in the next.

He was a master of three words most people find hard to say: "I do not know." Asked once what he actually did know, after answering "I do not know" to question after question, he laughed and thanked Allah for a day in which he could honestly say he did not.

He died at about eighty-six, one of the last of the major companions, having entered this world as it shook with the call of Islam and leaving it exactly as the Prophet ﷺ had advised him: as a stranger, as one passing through. He said at the end that he regretted nothing of this world except three things: the long days of fasting, the long nights of prayer, and the times he had not stood against oppression. He had married off a daughter in his final days because he had promised her in marriage and would not meet Allah with an unfulfilled promise. Through him runs what the scholars call the golden chain of hadith, from Malik, from Nafi, from Abdullah ibn Umar, from the Prophet ﷺ, the most

trustworthy chain there is, precisely because of how strictly this one man clung to the way of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

What Abdullah ibn Umar's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel only that here was a remarkable man of remarkable character. But character is not the lesson; the lesson is what his character was pointed at. Everything he did, the footsteps, the trees, the grey hairs, the open hands, was aimed at one thing: pleasing the Allah who had sent the Prophet ﷺ, and meeting Him one day with a clear face. His life is a question put to our own iman.

He loved the Prophet ﷺ the way we are meant to love him, and that love was not sentiment but obedience. He proved it not with grand declarations but with the smallest acts, in private, where no one was watching, walking the streets to place his feet on a memory. This is the quality to take from him: that love for the Prophet ﷺ is measured in following him, especially in the small things, and following him is, in the end, obedience to the One who sent him. Ask yourself how much of your own day is shaped by his sunnah, not as a performance, but quietly, because you love him and through him you love your Lord. You can revive one neglected sunnah today: a prayer, a remembrance, a way of eating or greeting or giving, done for Allah and asking nothing back.

He guarded his sincerity so closely he would not sip water in a place of worship, lest his intention be diluted. We live in an age built to corrupt the intention, where almost every good deed can be shown, counted, and admired. His life asks the hardest question sincerity ever asks: how much of what you do would you still do if no one would ever see it? Give something today the

way he gave, where no human being will know, and let it be for Allah alone, content that He has seen it.

And he held his peace with Allah's decree through poverty, through the loss of his father, through the upheaval of his ummah, and through being poisoned by a man he could name, refusing to meet his Lord with bitterness or blood on his hands. He feared Allah in a cup of water and trusted Allah in the face of death. When hardship reaches you, his life asks whether your fear of Allah is alive enough to soften your heart at an ordinary moment, and whether your trust in Him is strong enough to keep you from compromising the truth when it costs you.

He spent his whole life as a stranger passing through, and he was right to. What looked like a severe and lonely way of living was in truth a man traveling light toward the only destination that lasts. So take one thing from him into your own ordinary life. Follow the Prophet ﷺ in one small thing you had let slip. Do one good deed in secret, for Allah, that no one will ever praise. And carry a little of his urgency, living today as though you might not see tomorrow, because that is the truth he never let himself forget. May Allah be pleased with Abdullah ibn Umar, make us lovers and followers of His Messenger ﷺ as he was, and let us meet Him with hearts softened by His remembrance and clear of every burden.

This chapter follows the account of Abdullah ibn Umar (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (57:16); the meaning of Qur'an 5:27, that Allah accepts only from those mindful of Him, is

referred to in prose. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Qutham ibn Abbas

The Prophet's Likeness

He was the baby of the family, and it is worth pausing on what that meant in his house. To be born the youngest son of al-Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib was to arrive after the superstars had already taken their places. Ahead of him stood brothers with dominating eloquence and dominating presence, and a father who was the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, a man so beloved that he was like a father to the Prophet ﷺ himself. A child born into a house like that could be forgiven for wondering where on earth he would ever find his own place.

His name was Qutham ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him), and the name itself is a rarity. The Arabs tended to recycle the same names across generations, but Qutham was uncommon then and remains uncommon now. Allah, however, had given this quiet youngest son a distinction that none of his celebrated brothers could claim. Of all the children of al-Abbas, it was Qutham who most resembled the Prophet ﷺ in his very face and form.

The faces that carried his likeness

To understand what that resemblance meant, you have to know how rare and how cherished it was. There were only a handful of people on the earth who carried the Prophet's ﷺ likeness, and to be counted among them was treated almost as a kind of honour.

From the family there was Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, of whom the Prophet ﷺ said the most beautiful thing one person can say to another: you resemble me in my creation and in my character, in how you look and in how you behave. It was no accident that the Prophet ﷺ later chose Ja'far as the ambassador to the Negus in Abyssinia. What better face to send before a foreign king than the cousin who most resembled the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in both his appearance and his conduct.

There was al-Hasan ibn Ali, who resembled his grandfather's face so closely that Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) once lifted him into the air and said that the boy looked more like the Prophet ﷺ than like his own father, Ali. And there was Abu Sufyan ibn al-Harith, the Prophet's ﷺ cousin and his closest childhood friend, who looked so exactly like him. His likeness made his long absence from Islam all the more painful, and his eventual return all the sweeter, when at last he stood with the Prophet ﷺ at Hunayn and was welcomed home like a twin restored.

Into that small company comes the youngest son of al-Abbas. The scholars debated which of all of them looked the most identical to the Prophet ﷺ, and some of them named Qutham. There was a reason the question was difficult to settle in his case. When the Prophet ﷺ was alive, Qutham was only a baby. The full likeness emerged later, as he grew into a man, after the Prophet ﷺ had already passed away. It was as if Allah had hidden a portion of that beloved face inside an infant, to be unveiled slowly over the years that followed.

This was no trivial thing. So precious was that resemblance that, when Mus'ab ibn Umayr fell on the battlefield, some among the enemy saw a fallen man who resembled the Prophet ﷺ and cried

out in triumph that they had killed Muhammad ﷺ. The likeness could shake an entire army. And Qutham carried it.

A dream, and a portion of the Prophet in the house

The beauty of his story begins before his birth, with his mother, Lubaba, the wife of al-Abbas. While she was pregnant she dreamt a strange and arresting dream: that a part of the Prophet ﷺ was in her house. Not his whole body, but a portion of him, a piece of his very flesh, resting under her roof. The dream unsettled her, and she brought it to the Prophet ﷺ and asked him what it could mean.

He gave her an answer that turned the strangeness into a gift. She would give birth, he told her, and she would nurse a child of his alongside her own son. That child of his was al-Hussein. And so it came to pass. Lubaba nursed al-Hussein together with her own infant, and the two boys became foster brothers through that nursing. This is the meaning that the Prophet ﷺ drew out of her dream, for he said of al-Hussein, "Hussein is from me and I am from him." A portion of the Prophet ﷺ was indeed in her house, in the grandson she fed at her own breast beside her son.

It is hard to overstate how tender this season was. After the long years of hostility, the Prophet ﷺ was at last gathering his family around him, building out a full family life in the final year of his life, surrounded by these little ones. There is a narration of Lubaba nursing al-Hussein when the Prophet ﷺ took the baby and cradled him, and the infant urinated on him. The Prophet ﷺ asked her to hold his son so he could clean himself, and as she took al-Hussein she smacked his back, and the baby cried. The Prophet ﷺ looked at her and said gently that she had hurt him by hurting his boy. It is a small domestic moment, a baby's tears and a grandfather's tenderness, and from it the scholars drew a ruling

on the matter. But hold the picture in your mind, because it tells you the world the young Qutham was being raised inside: a world soaked in the Prophet's ﷺ affection for children.

Qutham had his own share of that affection. Abdullah ibn Abbas relates that he and Qutham were once playing together when the Prophet ﷺ passed by, and the Prophet ﷺ scooped the two boys up, setting one before him and one behind him on his riding animal, and carried them along. There it is again, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ stooping to gather up small children at play. The youngest son of al-Abbas was held by those hands.

My beloved, my beloved

The most famous story of Qutham comes wrapped in a line of poetry, and it shows you exactly how his likeness was felt by those who loved the Prophet ﷺ. While the Prophet ﷺ and the believers were under siege in Madinah, in the great campaign of the Confederates, al-Abbas was still back in Makkah, and he was sick with worry. What the Arabs were attempting against the Prophet ﷺ and his companions was, in plain terms, an attempt at extermination: to surround Madinah with the largest army the Arabs had ever assembled and to wipe Islam off the face of the earth once and for all.

Far away in Makkah, helpless and afraid for his nephew, al-Abbas reached for the one comfort within his arms. He would hold his youngest son tight, because that child looked so much like the Prophet ﷺ, and he would whisper over him, "My beloved, my beloved." And he recited verses for the boy, praising the noble nose of the Prophet ﷺ, the prophet of the Lord of all blessings, declaring that he would be the victorious one in spite of all the hatred of those who opposed him. Among the Arabs, to rub a man's nose in the dirt was the image of humiliation, and so the

father praised the honoured nose of the Prophet ﷺ while shaming the noses of his enemies, certain that his nephew would triumph and they would be brought low. He held the boy and waited for news from the north, clutching the small likeness of the one he loved as though clutching the Prophet ﷺ himself.

Then a servant arrived with the word he was praying for: the Prophet ﷺ and the companions had survived. The attempted massacre had failed. Al-Abbas was so overcome that he kissed the messenger on his forehead and set him free. And the child in whose face he had read his hopes through all those anxious days was Qutham.

The last to leave the grave

When the Prophet ﷺ passed from this world, the children of al-Abbas were woven into his final moments in a way that still astonishes. Of the burial itself it is said that Qutham was the last person to leave the grave of the Prophet ﷺ, the last to rise out of it and climb back into the daylight. What a distinction for the youngest of the family. His elder brother al-Fadl had taken the last walk with the Prophet ﷺ, and Qutham was the one who placed the final stone upon the body of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ before stepping up out of the grave.

Sit with that for a moment. The same hands that the Prophet ﷺ had once lifted onto his riding animal were the hands that laid the last stone over him and were the last to touch the earth of his resting place. The baby who looked most like him was the last to leave his side.

A man of courage and a man of dignity

The infant grew into a man, and Allah let his life run long, as the lives of most of al-Abbas's children did. He had been very young at his birth into Islam, and he lived to carry it far. He went out into the great campaigns against the Persians and the Romans, taking part in the conquests that pushed eastward through Iraq and Persia and beyond.

What the histories preserve of his character is a quiet dignity that refused to trade on his bravery. After one battle a man tried to award him a thousand extra shares of the spoils in recognition of his courage on the field. Qutham would not take it. Put it back, he said, allocate it toward the Muslims; I do not want it. He would not let his own valour become a means of profit. This was a man of real integrity, who could have leaned on his lineage and his likeness and his courage to enrich himself, and who instead handed the reward back to the community.

When Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) went out toward Iraq, he appointed Qutham as the governor of Madinah, entrusting the city of the Prophet ﷺ to this son of al-Abbas. The youngest of the family, the one who might once have wondered where his place would be, was now keeping the very city in which the Prophet ﷺ lay buried.

The banner that reached Samarqand

There is one thread in Qutham's life so beautifully woven that it is hard to read without wonder. He took part in the opening of Samarqand, far to the east, in the land that today lies in Uzbekistan. And he carried into that conquest the banner of Banu Hashim, the very same banner that his eldest brother al-Fadl had carried on the day of Hunayn, when only a handful of people stood firm around the Prophet ﷺ. The standard that the eldest brother had held beside the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was now in

the hands of the youngest, carried into a distant land the Prophet ﷺ had never seen.

And in Samarqand, Qutham died as a martyr, and there he was buried. Consider what Allah had crafted. A young man who looked like the Prophet ﷺ, whom the Prophet ﷺ used to hold close, who was the last to rise from the Prophet's ﷺ grave, now carried the banner of his clan to the edge of the known world and gave his life there, planting the faith in the soil of a place that would one day produce Imam al-Bukhari, the greatest defender of the words of the Prophet ﷺ ever to walk the earth, who would author the most authentic collection of the sayings of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. How did Islam reach that far corner of the earth so that such a man could be born there? It reached it carried on banners by men like Qutham, the youngest son who once seemed lost among his brilliant brothers.

This is the lesson the whole family teaches. We tend to fix our gaze on the superstar, on the dazzling Abdullah ibn Abbas with his overwhelming eloquence and beauty and intelligence, and to overlook what Allah was quietly building around him. But look at the brothers. Each one found his way. Al-Abbas was promised by Allah that his offspring would carry the longest reign in the history of this religion, and from his children came generations of caliphs and an empire that, with all its rises and falls, stretched across roughly a thousand years of Islamic history. All of it from the offspring of one uncle of the Prophet ﷺ. And much of what these quieter sons contributed was never written down at all. Allah knows it, even where the pages are silent.

What Qutham's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read about a man who looked like the Prophet ﷺ and to feel only a distant wonder, as though his story were a

beautiful thing that has nothing to ask of us. That would be a loss. His life is not a relic to admire. It is a question put to our own iman.

Begin with where he began: the baby of the family, born behind the superstars, with every reason to feel that his place had already been taken by louder and greater men. He did not spend his life straining to be seen. He let Allah place him. And Allah placed him in ways no striving could have arranged: the last to rise from the grave of the Prophet ﷺ, the bearer of his clan's banner to the ends of the earth, a martyr in the soil that would cradle the greatest scholar of hadith. Most of us are not the superstar. Most of us are somewhere in the crowd, watching others shine. Qutham's life tells you that your place with Allah is not measured by how loudly the world counts you. It is enough to be faithful where He has set you, and to trust that He is building something with your small, unseen part that you may never live to see completed.

Then look at the thousand shares he refused. He had earned them. No one would have blamed him for taking them. And he handed them back to the Muslims and said, plainly, I do not want it. There is a sincerity in that refusal, an ikhlas, that an ordinary life can imitate this week. How often do we make sure our good is noticed, that our contribution is credited, that the reward we are owed is collected to the last share. Qutham did the work and let the reward go, because his eye was not on the spoils. Ask yourself what you could do for Allah this week and quietly let go of: the credit, the recognition, the thing you are owed. To do the deed and release the reward to others is among the purest forms of faith, because it can only be done for the One who sees in secret.

And do not miss the father holding the child and whispering, my beloved, my beloved. That love was not really for the boy alone. It was love for the Prophet ﷺ, poured onto the one who carried his likeness. Our own love for the Prophet ﷺ is asked to be just as real, just as warm, even though we have never seen his face. We carry his likeness not in our features but in our character, in the ties we keep, the truth we speak, the burdens we carry for others, the way we deal with the children and the weak around us. That is the resemblance still open to us, and it is the one that Allah weighs. Carry his sunnah the way al-Abbas carried that child: close to the chest, with love, in the middle of fear, certain that the one you love will be victorious in the end.

Qutham took the banner of his clan into a land of strangers and died there so that the faith could take root. He never saw what would grow from that soil. We are part of what grew. Every quiet thing you do for Allah is a seed like that, planted in ground whose harvest you will not witness in this life, but which Allah keeps and Allah remembers. May Allah be pleased with Qutham ibn Abbas, the youngest who found his place, and grant us to carry the likeness of His Prophet ﷺ in our hearts and our deeds, and to plant for Him in silence what He alone will one day raise.

This chapter follows the account of Qutham ibn Abbas (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed. No Qur'an verse is quoted, as the source lecture cites none directly for this companion.

Ubaydullah ibn Abbas

The Generous Brother

There is a particular kind of test that almost no one talks about: the test of growing up beside someone who shines. Some people meet that test by resenting the light. They look at the brother, the sister, the friend whom everyone praises, and they tell themselves quietly that there is nothing left for them, that the gift was handed to someone else. And then there are the rare ones who look at that same light and feel no envy at all, only the question, "What is mine to give?" Ubaydullah ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) was one of the rare ones. He spent his whole life standing one step behind a brother the entire ummah turned to, and he turned that position into one of the most beautiful lives of generosity the early Muslims ever knew.

He is a man you may never have heard named. He has no famous saying that schoolchildren memorize, no battle that bears his name. And yet, when you sit with his story, you find that Allah honored him with things that the loudest names never received.

A child of the boycott, a child of the Prophet's house

His name tells you almost everything about where he stood. Ubaydullah means, in its root, the little Abd Allah, the younger Abdullah. He was born one year after his older brother, Abdullah ibn Abbas, and Abdullah had been born during the boycott of the Prophet ﷺ, in the valley where Quraysh tried to starve the

believers into surrender. So Ubaydullah came into the world about a year after that, into a family at the very heart of the persecuted clan of Banu Hashim.

That detail matters, because it placed both brothers inside the home of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ from infancy. Their father was al-Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib, the Prophet's own uncle. Abdullah carried a closeness that no one else in history shares: in the hunger of the boycott, when there was not even a date to be found for the customary blessing of a newborn, the Prophet ﷺ performed it with his own blessed saliva. In the middle of that darkness, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ found joy in these children.

Ubaydullah grew up in the warmth of that same household. One narration preserves a scene from his childhood that is almost impossible to read without smiling. The Prophet ﷺ would line up three of the sons of al-Abbas, Abdullah, Ubaydullah, and Kuthayyir, in a row, and then he would back away from them and say, "Whoever reaches me first, I will give him such and such." And the little boys would race toward the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and throw themselves onto him, climbing onto his chest and his back, and he would kiss them and embrace them. This was the family side of the Prophet ﷺ, the love he poured out on the children of his house. Ubaydullah was old enough to carry some of those memories with him for the rest of his life. Imagine being a small boy and knowing that the warmth of those arms was real, that you had run into them and been held.

The inheritance he chose

Every child of that family inherited something. Abdullah inherited the path of knowledge and walked it until he became the great scholar of the ummah, the one to whom people would travel for

understanding of the Qur'an. Ubaydullah inherited a different thing, and he embraced it fully. He took after their father in trade.

Al-Abbas had been an exceptionally wealthy merchant. He dealt in sweet scents, fine perfumes, fragrant burning woods, the luxuries that travelers sought out the moment they reached Makkah. His wealth was so vast that when the Prophet ﷺ stood on the day of his farewell and abolished the practice of usury forever, he named al-Abbas by name: whatever interest was owed to al-Abbas was now cancelled. A man does not get singled out like that unless his dealings were enormous.

There is a backstory to that wealth worth pausing on, because it teaches something about Allah's promise. Al-Abbas had been taken captive at the battle of Badr, before he openly embraced Islam, and the Prophet ﷺ would not treat him with special favor. He had to ransom himself like every other prisoner, paying out a great sum. About the captives of that day, Allah revealed a promise:

Prophet, tell those you have taken captive, 'If God knows of any good in your hearts, He will give you something better than what has been taken from you, and He will forgive you: God is forgiving and merciful.'

QUR'AN 8:70

What al-Abbas gave up to free himself, Allah returned to him many times over. The wealth he later carried was, in part, the fulfillment of that verse. And it was this wealth, this trade, this knowledge of how to buy and sell and grow a fortune, that passed into the hands of his son Ubaydullah. He became the merchant of the family, vast in his riches, vast in his generosity, a man whom the early historians described as noble in bearing, the

sort of person you could look at and simply know that he came from honorable stock.

The Bedouin and the five hundred coins

The clearest window into the heart of Ubaydullah is a single incident from one of his journeys. He and his companions lost their way crossing the desert and ran out of provisions, with no food and no water left. In that emptiness they came upon a Bedouin man who had almost nothing of his own, only a single pregnant goat. The Arabs of the desert took fierce pride in their hospitality, and this man was no exception. Without knowing who his guests were, he slaughtered his only goat and fed them. Ubaydullah and his men pleaded with him not to do it. This was the one animal Allah had provided for him. He did not need to give it away. But the man insisted, because in his eyes a guest at his door had to be honored.

Later, when Ubaydullah returned to his own wealth, he sent that Bedouin five hundred dinars. Five hundred gold coins, for one goat. One of his servants thought it was far too much and said so: five dinars would have been generous, five hundred is excessive. And here is the answer that reveals the whole man. Ubaydullah said, "That man is more generous than us." How could that be, the servant asked, when Ubaydullah had just given him a fortune? Ubaydullah replied, "He gave away all of his dunya, and we only gave away some of ours."

Sit with that for a moment. He had handed over a small fortune, and he still considered himself outdone, because generosity is not measured by the size of the gift but by the size of the sacrifice behind it. The Bedouin had given everything he owned. Ubaydullah had given from an overflowing abundance that he would never even feel the loss of. This is the meaning behind the

teaching of the Prophet ﷺ that a single coin can outweigh a hundred thousand: the one who gives one coin out of two has given half of all he has, while the one who gives a hundred thousand out of millions has barely felt the pinch.

There is a quiet warning in this for anyone whom Allah has blessed with means. Do not measure your giving against other people. Do not let the doors Allah opens for you become a reason to give the same small amount you always gave. As your provision rises, let your giving rise with it, because the One who sees what He gave you also sees what you returned to Him. Ubaydullah understood that the poor man pressing a single tomato or a single coin into the cause of Allah, feeling the cost of it in his bones, may stand higher before Allah than the rich man who writes a large number and never misses it.

How he found his place beside his brother

Now we come to the heart of it, to the thing Ubaydullah became famous for. Both brothers settled in Madinah, and the people there had a saying about them. Of the two, the more generous in knowledge was Abdullah, and the more generous in feeding people was Ubaydullah. So they said that Abdullah and Ubaydullah together had taken all the generosity of Madinah between them.

Here is how it worked. Abdullah ibn Abbas was the pride of the family, the scholar whose name became a byword for understanding. He held what was, in effect, a university in his own home, and the students lined up out the door. You had to arrive early in the morning to find a place in his gathering. Ubaydullah could have stood at the edge of that crowd and let envy curdle in him. He could have said, "He is just my brother. I

could teach too." He did not. He looked at his brother's gift and asked the only question that matters: what is mine to give?

His answer was to feed every single one of those students. He would fill his brother's house with trays of bread and meat, so that anyone who came to learn from Abdullah was also fed by Ubaydullah. The Bedouins of Madinah had a rhyme about it: whoever wants the dunya, the food, let him go to the house of Ubaydullah; and whoever wants the hereafter, the knowledge, let him go to the house of Abdullah. Two brothers, two open doors, one filling minds and one filling stomachs, and not a trace of rivalry between them.

This is not just a charming story. It is the living picture of a teaching the Prophet ﷺ once gave. There were two brothers in his time, and one of them spent all his hours in the company of the Prophet ﷺ while the other worked in the marketplace to support him. The working brother came to complain: my brother gets to sit with you all day, and I have to go haggle and trade so that I can feed him. It hardly seems fair. And the Prophet ﷺ answered him with words that should be carved into the heart of every quiet supporter: it may be that the only reason Allah provides for you at all is because you spend on him.

Think about what that means for someone like Ubaydullah, and for anyone today who builds the masjid, sponsors the teacher, funds the students, pays for the work of the deen, and sometimes wonders whether they are missing out on the sweetness that the people up front seem to taste. Ubaydullah never felt that loss. In his understanding, he received a share in everything his brother taught. He did not need to be as eloquent as Abdullah or as learned as Abdullah. He needed only to hold up his brother's hands, and Allah would write the reward of all that

knowledge for the one who made it possible. The histories say that in his era three of the most generous men of the Arabs all lived at the same time and in the same place, opening their doors to feed the people, and Ubaydullah was counted among them.

Honored without the spotlight

Ubaydullah was not a man who hid in his brother's shadow and did nothing else. In the year 36 after the Hijrah he was appointed governor of Yemen for a period, holding real authority over a province. And he was given a station that ran in the blood of his family: he was made the leader of the Hajj, the Amir who guides the pilgrims, for a year or two. Hajj was almost a family tradition for the house of al-Abbas. His brother Abdullah was the great authority people turned to for the rulings of the pilgrimage, the one who is even reported to have ridden behind the Prophet ﷺ during Hajj. And now Ubaydullah stood as the one who led the people in it.

As for his narrations from the Prophet ﷺ, he is remembered chiefly for a single hadith, and even that single report carries weight. It concerns a woman who came to the Prophet ﷺ with a question about the rules of remarriage, a ruling designed to protect the seriousness of marriage and to close off any attempt to game the sacred bond with a sham arrangement. Through Ubaydullah, that guidance reached the ummah. One faithful transmission, preserved and trusted, was enough to leave his name in the chains of the scholars forever.

And there is one more detail, small and tender, that says so much about the love between these two brothers. They each named a son after the other. Abdullah named a son Ubaydullah, and Ubaydullah named a son Abdullah, so that in the books of hadith you can find Abdullah ibn Ubaydullah ibn Abbas narrating from

Abdullah ibn Abbas, the nephew carrying his uncle's name and his uncle's words together. Two men who could so easily have been rivals instead wove their names into each other's children. Through one such chain comes an authentic report that the Prophet ﷺ gave three commands: to complete and perfect the rites of ablution, not to consume what was given as charity by those for whom it was forbidden, and not to crossbreed a donkey with a horse.

Ubaydullah lived a long life and died in Madinah, by some accounts as old as eighty-seven. He is buried there. A man most people have never heard of, and look at what Allah honored him with.

What Ubaydullah's life asks of our faith

It is easy to admire a man like Ubaydullah and then quietly set him aside, telling ourselves that we are not rich, that we have no famous brother, that our small lives have nothing in common with his. That would be a mistake. His life is not a display case. It is a question pressed gently against our own iman.

The first thing his life asks is whether we can be content with the role Allah has given us. Ubaydullah did not get the gift his brother got. He was not the scholar, not the one the crowds came to hear. And he never once let that turn into bitterness. Most of us carry some quiet resentment toward someone who received what we wanted, a sibling, a colleague, a friend who seems to shine where we stay dim. Ubaydullah shows us another way: to look at what we have not been given without envy, and to ask instead what we have been given to offer. Contentment with Allah's distribution, *ridā*, is itself an act of worship, and it begins the moment you stop measuring your portion against someone else's.

The second thing his life asks is about the secret sweetness of supporting good without needing to be seen doing it. Ubaydullah filled his brother's house with food and let his brother receive the praise. He understood that the one who quietly funds the work of the deen is not missing out, that Allah is recording every tray of bread as surely as He records every word taught. So do something for the sake of Allah that no one will applaud you for. Pay for someone's learning. Feed the people who serve. Hold up the hands of someone doing good, and let them have the spotlight, while you take the reward that only Allah sees. That is ikhlas, sincerity, doing the deed for Allah alone and being content that He has witnessed it.

The third thing his life asks is about how we give. Remember his words about the Bedouin: he gave all of his dunya, and we only gave some of ours. Real generosity is felt by the giver. It is the gift that costs you something, the charity you notice in your own provision. When Allah opens a door of wealth for you, his life asks whether you will let your giving grow to meet it, or keep handing over the same comfortable amount that never touches you. Give today in a way you can actually feel, even if it is small, because the One who weighs deeds is not counting the number on the coin but the love and the sacrifice behind it.

And underneath all of this is the deepest lesson of his quiet life: that nothing offered for the sake of Allah is ever lost or unseen. The streets of Madinah remembered Abdullah's name and barely registered Ubaydullah's, and yet Allah raised him to govern, to lead the pilgrims to His House, to be counted among the most generous of his age, and to carry the Prophet's words into the books of guidance. What the world overlooks, Allah honors. This is the promise that can change how you spend an ordinary day: that the small, hidden, unglamorous good you do for Allah is

being recorded by the One who never overlooks anything, and that He is the one whose praise outlasts every crowd.

So take one thing from Ubaydullah into your own life. Stop comparing your gift to someone else's, and ask what is yours to give. Then give it, quietly, in a way that costs you something, expecting nothing back from people. May Allah be pleased with Ubaydullah ibn Abbas, who held up his brother's hands and asked for no glory, and may Allah grant us a measure of his contentment, his sincerity, and his generous heart.

This chapter follows the account of Ubaydullah ibn Abbas (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (8:70). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Al-Fadl ibn Abbas

The Riding Companion of the Prophet ﷺ

There is a particular kind of difficulty in being born into a family that already has a star. Among the sons of Abbas, one name eclipses the rest: Abdullah ibn Abbas, the ocean of knowledge, the scholar of the ummah, the young man whom people said they had never seen the like of. If you were his brother, you were born to be outshone. You could not keep pace with him. And the natural soil for that situation is the soil of the brothers of Yusuf (may Allah be pleased with them), where one perfect young man drew out the jealousy of everyone around him.

But the story of this family did not grow that way. The story here is not jealousy. It is admiration. Each brother looked at what Abdullah was covering, looked at the gem their family had been given, and asked a different question: not how do I outshine him, but what is left for me to carry? Where is my place in the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and in serving this religion in a way that would please Allah? The eldest of those brothers, the one who carried the weight of being firstborn, was Al-Fadl ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him). His biography is short. What it holds is not.

The eldest son of a beautiful house

If there is ever a family in the seerah of whom you would say, looking on, "what a beautiful family, mashallah," it is the family of

Abbas ibn Abdul-Muttalib. It was a house that seemed to have everything. Every one of them carried a kind of presence, that aura the people spoke of, so that when the family of Abbas walked through a place, everyone turned to look. They mistook Abbas himself for a conqueror. They looked at the young Abdullah and said they had never seen anyone like him. And the same was said, each in his own way, of all the brothers.

Al-Fadl was the oldest of them. Allah had blessed Abbas with many children, fifteen that we know of, and the Prophet ﷺ had taught that a righteous child who makes du'a for a parent is a treasure left behind. A man with sons like these had a heavy scale of good. Each son had his own pathway, even when the histories preserve only a single line about him. Al-Fadl's pathway was shaped by his place at the front of the line, because the eldest carries responsibilities the others do not.

His kunya was Abu Muhammad, the father of Muhammad, though he never had a son. He would have only a daughter. The names of this family circle back into one another in a way that can confuse a reader. By the custom of the time, the eldest son names his own firstborn after his father, so the expectation was that Abdullah ibn Abbas would carry the kunya Abu al-Fadl. But Abdullah named his first son Al-Abbas instead, after his grandfather, and so the kunya of the family settled differently. These are small details. They matter only because they remind us that Al-Fadl was a real young man in a real household, with a name, a place at the table, and a part to play that no one else could play for him.

He was born around the year 614, roughly four years after the Prophet ﷺ received revelation. By the testimony of his own brother Abdullah, he was extremely handsome, a young man who

drew attention wherever he went. This was no surprise in a family known for its beauty. But hold that detail, because his good looks are not a passing flourish. They sit at the center of the single most famous moment of his life.

Raised to be his father's second

Picture his early years through his own eyes. Al-Fadl grew up in Makkah, with his father, while the Prophet ﷺ was in Madinah. He did not grow up in the household of the Prophet ﷺ the way some of the young cousins did. He grew up as the heir of Abbas, taken everywhere his father went, raised to be his replacement when the time came.

So he was the one at the tribal gatherings. He was the one standing beside his father at the important negotiations. He was being trained, year by year, to step into a role of leadership among his people. As for his faith in those years, the histories are quiet. We know his father concealed his Islam for a long time. We know his aunt did not conceal hers. Where exactly the young Al-Fadl stood, before the great turning, we are not told. His story, as we can tell it, begins the day the Prophet ﷺ returned.

When Makkah opened to Islam and the Prophet ﷺ entered the city victorious, Al-Fadl announced his faith, as his father did. And the Prophet ﷺ immediately drew him close. He appointed this handsome young cousin as something like his ambassador, his spokesman, his emissary to the people around him. If you wanted to reach the Prophet ﷺ, you came through Al-Fadl. If the Prophet ﷺ wished to send word, it often went out through Al-Fadl. From the very first days, the young man who had been raised to stand beside his father was now standing beside the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

Eight who stood firm at Hunayn

Almost at once came the test of battle. After the conquest of Makkah, the Muslims marched out to face a coalition of Bedouin tribes who were preparing a serious plot. The Prophet ﷺ took with him both the believers who had come with him from Madinah and the new Muslims of Makkah, and they went out to Hunayn. It was one of the hardest days the Prophet ﷺ ever faced on a battlefield.

The Muslims that day were many, and their numbers pleased them. Allah later corrected exactly that confidence:

God has helped you [believers] on many battlefields, even on the day of the Battle of Hunayn. You were well pleased with your large numbers, but they were of no use to you: the earth seemed to close in on you despite its spaciousness, and you turned tail and fled.

QUR'AN 9:25

The lesson buried in that verse is one the whole ummah was meant to learn: it was never the numbers that won anything. Victory comes when Allah is with you, and from no other place. When the trap was sprung and the fighting turned, people fled in every direction. The Prophet ﷺ found himself nearly alone in the open, calling out, "I am the Prophet, there is no lie in it. I am the son of Abdul-Muttalib." Only a handful of people held their ground around him, eight in the well-known account, while thousands scattered.

One of those eight was Al-Fadl. And on that same day he earned a place in the record of firsts: he was the first to carry the standard of Banu Hashim after Islam, the flag of the Prophet's own clan. So picture him there, young, recently come into his faith openly, holding the banner of his family and refusing to

move while the field emptied around the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. The others reconvened, and the day was won. But the courage was already proven. Al-Fadl had shown, in the first weeks of his public Islam, that his nearness to the Prophet ﷺ was not a matter of comfort and honor alone. When it cost something, he stayed.

The man on the camel's back

The title that history fastened to him is al-radif, the riding companion. It opens a small window onto how the Prophet ﷺ treated the young people of his family. He would take them up onto his mount and ride with them, and as he rode he would give them counsel meant for them alone. Every one of these young relatives carried away a private moment with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, because he was mindful, deliberately, of giving each of them a share.

The most famous of those rides came during the Farewell Hajj, the one and only Hajj the Prophet ﷺ performed, the Hajj that has guided the ummah ever since. Out of the vast gathering, Al-Fadl was the one chosen to ride behind him from Muzdalifah to Mina. Imagine being that single person, seated on the camel at the back of the Prophet ﷺ, among more than a hundred thousand pilgrims. The Prophet ﷺ moved swiftly that morning, and the speed itself became sunnah, the manner of proceeding from Muzdalifah onward. Al-Fadl held on, and because he held on, he heard. He narrated what the Prophet ﷺ said and did, step by step, the talbiyah continuing until the stones were cast at the Jamrah. Across more than a thousand seasons of Hajj since, what the Prophet ﷺ did on his one Hajj has reached the millions who never saw him, and part of it reached them through the young man on the back of his camel.

It was on the Day of Sacrifice, the day of Eid, that the moment came for which Al-Fadl is remembered above all else. The Prophet ﷺ dismounted and began answering the people's questions. In Hajj, every Muslim becomes like a child again, anxious and unsure: did I break this rule, can I do that, we did this one out of order, what now. There was no way to address the whole crowd at once. The Prophet ﷺ was slaughtering with his own blessed hand, making his own du'a, speaking to everyone who came, giving them the rulings of their rites one by one. And Al-Fadl was holding the camel, watching, as the people lined up to ask.

Lower your gaze

A young woman came forward to ask her question. She was from the tribe of Khath'am, and she too was strikingly beautiful. So now there was a very handsome young man and a very beautiful young woman, and as she put her question to the Prophet ﷺ, Al-Fadl began to look at her, and she began to look at him.

What the Prophet ﷺ did next is one of the most tender corrections in all of his sunnah. He reached up, put his hand gently to Al-Fadl's cheek, and turned the young man's face the other way, then went back to answering the woman. Al-Fadl's gaze drifted again, and again the Prophet ﷺ gently turned his face aside. He did this three times before the message landed: lower your gaze, keep your eyes down.

Look at how he taught. He did not strike him. He did not shout, did not shame him in front of the crowd. Nor did he ignore it, though with a slaughter to perform and a multitude pressing in he had every excuse to let it pass. He simply, kindly, turned the young man's face away. The correction was firm and complete, and it left Al-Fadl's dignity intact.

The woman's question, when she finally asked it, mattered too. She said the obligation of Hajj that Allah had made binding upon His servants had come due for her father while he was too old to sit on a mount, too frail to make the journey. Could she perform Hajj on his behalf? And the Prophet ﷺ told her, yes, she could. From this exchange the ummah learned the ruling of Hajj performed for an elderly parent who cannot travel, or for one who has died, once a person has done their own. Two lessons in one scene: how to gently lower a gaze, and how to carry a parent's worship when they no longer can.

In one narration, carried in some books though weaker in others, the Prophet ﷺ turned to Al-Fadl afterward and spoke to him with love, calling him "O son of my brother," O nephew. He told him this was a mighty day in the sight of Allah, that whoever guarded his eyes and his ears and his tongue on it would be forgiven. The meaning was plain and gentle: I did not mean to humiliate you, I meant to protect your reward. All of us slip. But do not let yourself slip on a day like this and lose what Allah was about to give you. The hand on the cheek was not rebuke. It was a man preserving the prize of a young relative he loved.

The last days, and the long road after

Al-Fadl stayed near the Prophet ﷺ to the very end. When the Prophet ﷺ could no longer walk in his final illness and had to be carried, two men supported him, Ali and Al-Fadl. So Al-Fadl helped carry the Messenger of Allah ﷺ into the house where he would pass away, and he was there when he passed.

Then, because he was the eldest son of Abbas, Al-Fadl took part in every single rite of the Prophet's burial. He helped wash the body of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He went down into the grave to receive him and lay him to rest. No other son of Abbas was

present at every stage of it; Al-Fadl was. The young man who had ridden behind him on the camel now lowered him into the earth.

And after the Prophet ﷺ was gone, the courage that had held firm at Hunayn carried Al-Fadl onto a wider road. He went out with the armies into Sham, and if you trace the geography it begins to take shape in the mind: the lands that are Jordan and the wider region today. He fought at the great battle of Yarmuk, and he carried into it some of the armor of the Prophet ﷺ, the Messenger's own shield. Imagine that, his cousin going forward against the Byzantine lines with the shield of the Prophet ﷺ in his hand. In one account, he and another companion stood in the front lines, each fighting as if he were a thousand men. Brave, sincere, unyielding. He was there at the opening of the land, on the front lines against the Roman soldiers, until the commander of the Byzantine army that day was killed and the place was opened.

He did not die where you might expect a man like him to die. Some say he fell in battle. Others say he was taken by the plague of Amwas, a martyr alongside so many companions who had survived the fiercest fighting only to be claimed by the plague. He was buried in the land of Sham. The eldest son of Abbas, the flag-bearer of Banu Hashim, the riding companion of the Prophet ﷺ, came to rest far from the Makkah of his boyhood, on ground that Islam had opened.

What Al-Fadl's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read Al-Fadl's story as a string of honors. He rode behind the Prophet ﷺ. He carried the banner. He held the camel. He washed the body and entered the grave. But the

deepest thing in his life is not the honors. It is the way he found his place.

He was the brother of the most luminous young man of the ummah, and he refused to let that crush him. Where another soul would have curdled into envy, Al-Fadl looked at what his brother was carrying and simply asked what was left for him to carry for the sake of Allah. That choice is quietly available to every one of us. There will always be someone ahead of you, more gifted, more praised, more visible, someone covering the very ground you hoped was yours. Faith is the difference between letting that fact poison you and letting it free you. Al-Fadl's life asks whether you can be glad for the gem in your own family, your own circle, your own masjid, and then go looking for the work that still needs doing. The ummah is wide. There is always a banner no one has picked up yet.

Take his gaze, too, on the day of the camel. He was a young man, and he slipped, the way the young and the old both slip. What is striking is not that he looked, but that when the hand of the Prophet ﷺ turned his face, he did not argue, did not bristle, did not defend himself. He received the correction. In an age when our eyes are pulled in a hundred directions before we have finished a single thought, the lowering of the gaze is not a small or old-fashioned thing. It is a daily act of obedience to Allah, done when no one is turning your face for you. You can do it today, in your own hand: turn the screen, turn your eyes, not because anyone is watching, but because Allah is, and because guarding the eye guards the heart that has to meet Him. The Prophet ﷺ called it the path to forgiveness on a mighty day. Treat your own ordinary days as mighty enough to deserve it.

And remember Hunayn. The lesson Allah pressed into that verse is the lesson Al-Fadl lived: it was never the numbers. Not the size of the army, not the depth of the pocket, not the brilliance of the famous brother. Help comes from Allah, and from nowhere else. When you feel small beside the gifted, or thin beside the strong, that verse is for you. Stand your ground with the eight who stayed, hold the banner you have been given, and leave the outcome to the One who actually decides it. What looks like too little in your hands is more than enough in His.

So take one thing from Al-Fadl into your life now. Find the work the celebrated ones have left undone, and do it quietly for Allah. Lower your gaze once today when no one would have known. And when you are outnumbered by your own weakness, lean not on your numbers but on your Lord. May Allah be pleased with Al-Fadl ibn Abbas, who carried the banner when others fled and the body of his beloved Prophet ﷺ when others could not, and may He give us a share of the heart that seeks its own small place in His service and is content with it.

This chapter follows the account of Al-Fadl ibn Abbas (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (9:25). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abdullah ibn Abbas

The Scholar of the Ummah

Imagine walking into the mosque of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the years after his passing, when the companions who had stood at Badr still filled its rows. You would expect every eye to follow the elders, the men with grey in their beards who had walked beside the Messenger of Allah for twenty years. Instead, you would watch the room turn toward a single young man, barely out of his teens. When he entered, attention gathered to him; when he spoke, the veterans of Badr fell silent and listened. And you would find yourself asking how an eighteen or twenty year old could command the room over the greatest generation ever to live.

His name was Abdullah ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him), and to understand why the ummah leaned on him, you have to go back to a baby born in a place of hunger, to the saliva of a Prophet who had no food to give.

Born in the boycott

Abdullah ibn Abbas was born about three years before the Hijra, in the hardest era of the Prophet's life in Makkah: the boycott of Banu Hashim and Banu al-Muttalib. Quraysh had cut off the Prophet's clan from trade and food and herded them into a narrow valley to be starved into surrender. Picture a child born into a siege, into a place sealed off and forgotten, the way we

have seen such places in our own time. And into that misery a baby arrived who would become a source of joy.

His father was al-Abbas, an uncle of the Prophet ﷺ only about three years older than him, closer to a brother than an elder, a generous man who kept the family together and protected his nephew much as Abu Talib did. His mother was Lubaba, among the very first women to accept Islam, and her son grew up remembering that he had prayed beside her from the earliest he could recall. This was not a family on the fence. It was a practising, believing household living quietly as Muslims inside hostile Makkah, among those too weak to make the journey to Madinah.

When this baby was brought to the Prophet ﷺ during the boycott, the Prophet did what he loved to do with a newborn: take a date, soften it in his mouth, and rub it on the roof of the child's mouth. But there were no dates, nothing to chew. So the Prophet ﷺ took only his own blessed saliva and rubbed it on the palate of the infant, and the baby swallowed what the Messenger of Allah had given him. Of all the family and companions of the Prophet ﷺ, Abdullah ibn Abbas is said to be the only one whose first taste of life came from the saliva of the Prophet alone, because in that valley there was no food. There the bond began.

The boy who would not leave

The Prophet ﷺ played with him, carried him, made supplication over him. In the worst days of his life he would call for this child, and the smile would return to his face. Then, when Abdullah was only four or five, the most beloved human being on earth left for Madinah, and the boy stayed behind in the secret community of believers, growing up on stories of how the Prophet had once held him. Years later came the conquest of Makkah and the

reunion. Abdullah, now around nine, came to the Prophet ﷺ who remembered every moment of that hard time. Soon after, Abdullah and his family made the journey to Madinah, and the Prophet ﷺ told them they were the last of the emigrants, just as he was the last of the prophets.

In Madinah the boy wasted no time. He shadowed the Prophet ﷺ in every way a child could: fetching the water for his ablution, carrying his sandals, trying to ride behind him. And then he had an idea that tells you everything about him. He asked his aunt Maymunah, the Prophet's wife, whether he could sleep at her house on the night the Prophet ﷺ would be there, so that he could watch him through the dark.

The houses of the Prophet's wives were tiny rooms with a single mattress. The Prophet ﷺ and Maymunah lay across the bed, and the boy lay at their feet, awake, watching. Around the middle of the night the Prophet ﷺ woke, and he did not stir slowly: he sat straight up, for his eyes slept but his heart never did. He wiped the sleep from his face, recited the closing verses of Surah Aal Imran, then rose to pray. Abdullah rose with him, watched him make a careful ablution from a hanging waterskin, and copied every motion. When the Prophet stood to pray he placed Abdullah on his right, but the boy kept drifting behind, and twice the Prophet ﷺ reached back and drew him level. Afterward he asked why. Abdullah answered that it did not befit anyone to stand beside the Messenger of Allah, and the Prophet ﷺ, pleased, embraced him and prayed for him.

That prayer would be repeated, in one form or another, more than forty times across his childhood. *O Allah, teach him the Book and its wisdom. O Allah, grant him understanding of the religion, and teach him interpretation.* The scholars say the Prophet ﷺ was

deliberate with his supplications, and that he chose for this boy the gift of knowledge again and again, which is no small sign of love, for knowledge is the one increase Allah Himself commands to be asked for:

exalted be God, the one who is truly in control. [Prophet], do not rush to recite before the revelation is fully complete but say, 'Lord, increase me in knowledge!'

QUR'AN 20:114

The hunger to be near

There is a moment that captures how fiercely Abdullah guarded that closeness. Milk was brought to a gathering, with Abu Bakr and Umar on one side and the boy on the Prophet's right, and out of respect for the two elders the Prophet asked Abdullah whether he would let it go to them first. The child would not give up his turn: he could not, he said, prefer anyone over himself when it came to receiving something from the Prophet's own hand, and the Prophet ﷺ honoured the boy's longing and let him drink.

It was this same closeness that earned him one of the most profound conversations ever recorded. Riding behind the Prophet ﷺ one day, the boy heard him turn and say, "O young man, let me teach you some words." This was a heart spoken into a child's heart, from a man past sixty who knew his time was short, to a boy he loved and would not see grow up. "Be mindful of Allah, and Allah will protect you. Be mindful of Allah, and you will find Him before you. If you ask, ask Allah. If you seek help, seek it from Allah. Know that if the whole nation gathered to benefit you, they could not benefit you except with what Allah has written for you, and if they gathered to harm you, they could not harm you

except with what He has written against you. The pens have been lifted and the pages have dried."

Look closely at the wisdom of it. The Prophet ﷺ was speaking to a child he knew would one day be a star, a boy the whole ummah would crowd around and praise. And his counsel was the opposite of what fame whispers: do not attach your heart to people, for none of them can harm or benefit you. Keep your eyes on Allah. Keep your intention sincere. Abdullah carried those words for the rest of his life.

How a boy became the ocean

He had only about three years near the Prophet ﷺ, from roughly the age of ten to thirteen. Yet he narrated more than sixteen hundred traditions, and the detail in them is astonishing. He remembered how many bites the Prophet took, which part of the meat he preferred, even what he recited in the silent prayers, which he could tell only by watching the movement of his lips.

When the Prophet ﷺ passed away, Abdullah was among the closest relatives who washed and buried him, one of those who entered the grave to receive the blessed body. For a boy of thirteen who had centred his whole life on this man, it was a wound that should have broken him. Instead, he turned grief into purpose. He noticed that all the companions who had scattered to other lands had returned for the funeral, and he said to a friend, now is our chance: let us go to every one of them and gather everything they carry of the Prophet ﷺ. His friend preferred to play, as boys did, with their pigeons. Abdullah left him to it.

So he went, alone, to the door of one companion after another. He would lay his cloak in the dust on their doorstep and lie down

to wait, not as a beggar for money but as a beggar for knowledge: every tradition they held, every memory, every story. It became a quiet wonder in Madinah, that you might open your door and find the cousin of the Messenger of Allah asleep on your threshold. The companions were embarrassed, and they would brush the dust from him and say, cousin of the Prophet, you should have called us to you. And he taught them, and taught us, a principle the people of knowledge have repeated ever since: knowledge is sought; it does not come to you; you go to it.

This is how a boy who was barely present for the revelation became the foremost scholar of the Qur'an. He had asked the Prophet ﷺ about verse after verse, when it came down and why, and then he spent his youth collecting from everyone who had seen what he had missed, pen and paper in hand. The titles came while he was still young, perhaps seventeen: the interpreter of the Qur'an, the scholar of the ummah, and finally simply the ocean, so that a narrator could say "I asked the ocean" and every listener knew whom he meant.

In the circle of Umar

Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) had an eye for young talent, and he drew the teenage Abdullah into his closest councils, saying he had seen the Prophet ﷺ wipe his hand over the boy's head and pray for him, and that was reason enough. His father gave him three pieces of advice for the company of the Khalifa: never betray a confidence, never backbite in his presence, and never let him catch you in a lie.

The elders resented the boy in the room. One protested that they had sons his age, and what was a teenager doing among men of seventy and eighty. So Umar made a test of it. He asked them all what was meant by the chapter that opens, "When God's help

comes." They gave sound answers, that the Prophet ﷺ was commanded to praise his Lord and seek forgiveness after a long road to victory. Then Umar turned to Ibn Abbas, who said something none of them had reached: this was the announcement of the Prophet's death. Allah had told His Messenger that his work was complete and his time had come.

When God's help comes and He opens up your way [Prophet], when you see people embracing God's faith in crowds, celebrate the praise of your Lord and ask His forgiveness: He is always ready to accept repentance.

QUR'AN 110:1-3

Umar agreed, and from then on, when something in the Book was difficult, he would point to the young man and say, dive, O diver, and command everyone else to listen. Like Umar, Abdullah wept so much in prayer that two channels were worn into his cheeks from reciting through the night.

In Umar's time Abdullah turned his home into what became the first true university of Islam. He set a different subject for each day: the Qur'an, the traditions of the Prophet, law, the campaigns, language and poetry, history. People camped outside to claim a place inside, and his younger brother Ubaydullah, who had wealth rather than knowledge, sponsored the food so that his brother could teach. People said they had never seen a gathering with more learning.

His was never knowledge for its own sake. Two men once came to him on the same day with the same question: if a man kills someone, can he be forgiven? To the first he said yes; to the second, no. He could read in the first a soul that had already sinned and was desperate for a way back to Allah, while the

second was looking for a licence to kill. The answer was not in a book. It was in the heart of the one asking.

Wisdom in the hardest years

What set this generation apart is that they lived to see Islam tested by civil strife and held their character through it. When the Khalifa Uthman was besieged and killed, Abdullah was away leading the pilgrims as amir of Hajj. He spent those terrible years trying to calm the ummah, a man trusted by every side, and under Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) he became a close adviser. His judgment shows in a single famous episode.

A breakaway faction had risen, the Khawarij, thousands gathered in a valley, men who killed companions while believing themselves more religious than the companions. Ali feared even sending someone to speak with them. Abdullah asked permission to go. He put on his finest cloak, combed his hair, and walked into their camp at midday. What he saw shook him: the marks of prostration worn into their foreheads, eyes reddened from the Qur'an, a sound like the humming of bees from all their recitation. They looked, by every outward sign, more devout than he was, and yet the Prophet ﷺ had said of such people that their recitation would not pass their throats. He reasoned with them point by point through their grievances against Ali, answering each from the Book and the history they themselves accepted. Of six thousand, two thousand repented that day and returned with him to pledge their loyalty. He had walked into a camp of men who would kill a passerby, and walked out with two thousand of them turning back to Allah.

The same character showed in smaller things. When the aged Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, who had hosted the Prophet ﷺ in Madinah, arrived in Basra burdened with debt while Abdullah was its

governor, Abdullah gave him everything: forty thousand dinars, twenty servants, and his own house to live in, for the way Abu Ayyub had once honoured the Prophet. He also freed slaves and made them his greatest students, so that those who carried his knowledge to the next generation were largely men he had freed and taught.

The light that stayed

The Prophet ﷺ had foretold something else for this boy. Allah had once let the child glimpse the angel Jibril sitting with the Prophet when no one else could see him, and the Prophet ﷺ said that one who sees such a thing and lives long enough will lose his sight. In old age, around seventy, Abdullah went blind from cataracts. They told him he could be excused from prostrating. He refused; he would not leave off prostration. And he said something that reveals the whole man: if Allah has taken the light from my eyes, there is still light in my tongue and in my heart, and my mind still reasons without defect, so I am pleased with Allah. He kept teaching, and he kept reciting, saying that if you tried to count the blessings of Allah you could not.

He had grown weary of the bloodshed of the times and wanted no part of it. Offered governorship after governorship, he withdrew at last to Taif, far from Makkah and Madinah and the rivalries between them, and there he died. They say that when his noble body was lowered into the grave, a white dove flew down into his shroud and did not come out, and that a voice was heard reciting, though no one could find its source:

'[But] you, soul at peace: return to your Lord well pleased and well pleasing; go in among My servants; and into My Garden.'

His whole life had been the Qur'an, and at his burial it was the Qur'an they heard. The people said that day that the scholar of the ummah had passed away. A relative from the Prophet's house led his funeral prayer, and his freed students carried his learning forward as the great scholars of the next generation.

What Ibn Abbas's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read about the most knowledgeable companion and feel only awe, to file him away as a genius with nothing to ask of an ordinary person. That would be a mistake. His life is not a trophy. It is a question put to your own iman.

Notice first where his knowledge came from. It did not fall on him. He chased it, lying in the dust outside other people's doors while his friends played, because he believed there was nothing better he could do with his youth than gather the words of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. The quality to imitate is not raw brilliance, which is given to few, but the hunger any of us can choose: to treat the knowledge of Allah and His Prophet ﷺ as worth going to, worth being inconvenienced for. Most of us wait for knowledge to be made easy. He went to it on his knees. You can open the Book tonight and read it slowly, asking not how fast you can finish but how deeply you can understand, exactly as he warned against swallowing the Qur'an without absorbing it.

Then remember the words the Prophet ﷺ pressed into him as a boy, aimed at the exact danger his fame would bring. The whole ummah would one day crowd around Ibn Abbas, and he was told, before any of it came, that not one of those people could help him or harm him beyond what Allah had decreed. This is the heart of tawhid in daily life. We spend so much worry on what

people think of us, on their approval and their displeasure, when the pens have already been lifted and the pages have dried. To be mindful of Allah, to ask only of Him, to seek help only from Him, is to set your heart down in the one place that cannot fail you. Ask how much of your fear and hope is spent on people who control nothing, and how much on the One who controls everything.

And see how he met his own losses. He buried the Prophet ﷺ he loved, and stood beside Umar on the day he was struck down. When word came that one of his sons had died, he answered it by praying, then reciting the verse that gives glad tidings to the patient, the ones who say, when struck by misfortune, that to Allah they belong and to Him they return. He went blind and said he was pleased with Allah, because the light he cared about was never in his eyes. This is contentment with the decree, not as a slogan but as a habit worn in over a lifetime. When loss comes to you, and it will, his life asks whether your trust in Allah can outlast the things you thought you could not live without.

So take something small and real from him into your own week. Seek one piece of beneficial knowledge the way he sought it, going to it rather than waiting for it, and act on what you learn for the sake of Allah alone. When you next find yourself anxious over someone's opinion, remember the boy on the camel and return your heart to Allah, who alone can benefit and harm. And when something is taken from you, try to say, even once, with your whole heart, that you are pleased with your Lord. That is how the scholar of the ummah lived, in nearness to Allah through His Book, and it is a way still open to anyone who reaches for it. May Allah be pleased with Abdullah ibn Abbas, grant us a share of his love for the Qur'an, and draw us near to Himself and to His

beloved Messenger ﷺ as He drew near this young man who never let go.

This chapter follows the account of Abdullah ibn Abbas (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (20:114, 110:1-3, 89:27-30). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

The Four Abdullahs

The Servants Who Carried the Religion Forward

There is a name the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said was among the most beloved to Allah, and it is not a name of beauty or of conquest or of lineage. It is a name of position. Abdullah. The servant of Allah. It says nothing about the man who carries it except the one relationship that matters, that he belongs to his Lord. And so, in the generation that surrounded the Prophet ﷺ, that name was given again and again, until there were not ten or twenty companions who bore it, but somewhere between three and four hundred. Fathers named one son Abdullah and another Abdur-Rahman, the servant of the Most Merciful, because they had heard the Prophet ﷺ say that these two were the dearest names to Allah.

Out of all of those, the books of Islam came to single out four men. Not because they were the best to carry the name, but because of what they carried in their hearts and what they did with their long lives. When the scholars say "the Abdullahs," they mean these four: Abdullah ibn Abbas, Abdullah ibn Umar, Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr, and Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-As (may Allah be pleased with them all). This is their story together, and it is, in a quiet way, the story of how the religion reached us at all.

The best of the Abdullahs, and the one called simply "Abdullah"

Before we meet the four, two other men named Abdullah deserve to be placed before them, because the four would have been the first to insist on it.

The best Abdullah ever mentioned in the sunnah was not one of the four. It was Abu Bakr as-Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him). We know him by his nickname and his honorific, but his actual given name was Abdullah. He was the best of all the companions, and so he was also the best of every man who ever wore the name Abdullah. It is worth pausing on that. The greatest servant of Allah among the companions is remembered not as Abdullah but as Abu Bakr, the truthful one, the close friend. The name was his, yet the title the people gave him reached even higher.

Then there is the man you meet again and again in the books without any other name attached. When a narration says only that "Abdullah said this" or "Abdullah said that," with nothing after it, the scholars know it means Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (may Allah be pleased with him). He was among the very first to accept Islam. He sat so close to the source that he took the Qur'an fresh from the mouth of the Prophet ﷺ, the way a man drinks from the spring itself rather than from a cup carried a long way. The Prophet ﷺ said that whoever wished to hear the Qur'an recited with the same freshness it had when it was revealed should listen to the recitation of Ibn Mas'ud.

But Ibn Mas'ud died early, before the great trials of the community arrived. And because he passed before those years, we did not receive from him everything that such a man could have given. This is true of so many of the companions: they held an enormous weight in the religion, yet because of when they died, only a portion of what they knew reached the generations

after them. It is part of what makes the four who remain so important. They lived long enough to give almost everything they had.

Why these four

So why are these four spoken of as a set, as "the Abdullahs," when there were hundreds more?

The first reason is the simplest and the heaviest. They lived long. They lived through the devastating twists and turns of early Islamic history, the years of civil strife and confusion and assassination that the community would call the fitna, the trials. The men who died early were spared those years, but they were also unable to guide the community through them. The four Abdullahs were not spared. They walked into the storm carrying within them entire encyclopedias of understanding, narrations from the Prophet ﷺ that they could now apply in real time, to real crises, and then teach to the next generation. And because they were scattered across different regions of a fast-growing empire, the footprint they left was enormous. They are among the companions we take the most from in every Islamic science. Whatever branch of knowledge you study, at some point you must pass through these four men.

The second reason is that each of them was distinguished by something of his own, as if Allah had divided the inheritance of the Prophet ﷺ among them so that no one of them would have to carry all of it alone.

Abdullah ibn Abbas was distinguished by his love of the Qur'an. He became the interpreter of the Qur'an, the one the community turned to when it wanted to understand what Allah had said. Abdullah ibn Umar was distinguished by his love of the sunnah,

his careful, almost trembling devotion to doing things exactly as the Prophet ﷺ had done them, down to the smallest detail. Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-As was distinguished by his asceticism, his turning away from the world even when the world was offered to him. And Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr was distinguished by his courage. He would one day be called khalifa, a leader who governed, a man who led a strong revolt and stood his ground when standing was the hardest thing to do.

It was said of two of them in a single sentence that captures the shape of all four: we never saw a man more knowledgeable than Ibn Abbas, and we never saw a man more pious than Ibn Umar. Knowledge in one, devotion in another, detachment in a third, courage in the fourth, and all of it preserved and passed on because they lived long enough to pass it.

The ones the community asked

There is a tendency, when we read about the companions, to imagine that all of them were scholars, that every single one issued rulings and taught crowds. That is not how it was. There were tens of thousands of companions, and they were not all jurists. Only a handful were looked to as the ones who could give a fatwa, a considered religious ruling, and the community knew exactly who those few were.

Ibn al-Qayyim, gathering the reports of the earlier scholars, sorted the companions by how much they were asked. He found that the companions from whom rulings were learned numbered somewhere over thirty, men and women together. Then he narrowed it further. The ones who gave the most rulings, who carried the largest share of the community's questions, were seven: Umar, Ali, Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, Aisha, Abdullah ibn Abbas, Abdullah ibn Umar, and Zayd ibn Thabit (may Allah be

pleased with them all). If you were to collect the rulings of any one of those seven on their own, it was said, you would have volumes of books from that single person.

Two of the four Abdullahs sit in that highest circle, Ibn Abbas and Ibn Umar, and they are the first two we will come to know in depth. After the seven came a second group, around thirteen companions who gave rulings in moderation, and among them were Abu Bakr, Abu Hurayrah, Abdullah ibn Amr, and others. Note something here that is easy to miss. Abu Bakr is in the second group, not the first, even though Abu Bakr was greater than every one of the seven. The list does not measure rank. It measures how much each one was asked. A man can be higher in the sight of Allah and still have given fewer rulings, simply because of the life he lived and the time he was given. Rank and output are not the same thing, and the early scholars were careful never to confuse them.

After the second group came the rest of the companions, from whom you find a ruling here, a narration there, usually tied to one specific situation they had personally faced. The point of all of this counting is not to rank human beings. It is to show how the religion was actually preserved: not as a vague memory spread thinly across a whole generation, but as a deep trust carried by particular people who were asked, and who answered, and who taught, until what they held became the inheritance of everyone who came after.

Four men, one storm, four answers

Here is what makes these four so worth sitting with. They were contemporaries. They knew each other. They argued and deliberated with each other. They taught overlapping circles of students, and the chains of knowledge that run through Islamic

history cross and recross through their four names. They were not four isolated giants on four separate mountains. They were four men in the same valley, facing the same storm.

And the storm was real. The community of the Prophet ﷺ was, in their lifetimes, engulfed by war and civil strife, by confusion and assassination, by rival authorities each claiming a piece of the land. There was no clean, obvious path through it. And the four Abdullahs did not all take the same path. Each of them responded to the politics of his time somewhat differently from the others.

But here is the thing to hold onto. Every one of those different responses was rooted in principle. Not one of the four was a sellout. Not one was a traitor. Not one of them ever undermined the community of Muhammad ﷺ for his own gain. They disagreed, sometimes sharply, about how to act in a collapsing situation, and yet all four were sincere, and all four were principled. That is a lesson the community has needed in every century since. It is possible for righteous people who fear Allah to look at the same crisis and reach different conclusions about what to do, and for all of them to be acting out of faith rather than ambition. Difference of opinion is not the same as betrayal. Principled disagreement among sincere people is not a flaw in the religion. It is one of its mercies.

There is something deeply enriching in the picture of these four consulting one another, weighing the turmoil, trying to discern the path that would least harm the community they all loved. One reached for knowledge, one for the letter of the sunnah, one for withdrawal from the fight, one for the sword and the seat of authority. None of them claimed to have the whole answer alone. They needed each other, and they knew it.

The footprint they left

When we say these four men are among those we take the most from, it is not an exaggeration meant to honor them. It is a plain fact about how the knowledge reached us. They were all narrators of hadith, and not only from the Prophet ﷺ directly. They narrated from one another and from other companions, gathering what they had not personally witnessed from those who had, checking it, preserving it, and passing it on with care.

Spread across the regions of the growing Muslim world, they became living references. A question in one city, a difficulty in another, a dispute over how the Prophet ﷺ had actually done a thing, and the answer would often trace back to one of these four. They were the bridge between the generation that saw the Prophet ﷺ with their own eyes and the generations who would only ever know him through reliable transmission. Without that bridge, the whole structure would not stand the way it does.

This is the part that should change how we read their names when we come across them. Every time a ruling rests on Ibn Abbas, every time a detail of how to pray or fast rests on Ibn Umar, every time the community remembers a saying because Ibn Amr wrote it down or Ibn al-Zubayr preserved it, the religion that reached your own prayer mat passed, at some point, through one of these four servants of Allah. They did not merely live good lives. They held the line of transmission open with their bodies and their years, through the worst trials their community had yet seen, so that what they had received would not be lost.

What the lives of the Abdullahs ask of our faith

It is easy to read about four great scholars and feel only a distant respect, to file them away as figures too high and too learned to

have anything to do with an ordinary life. That would be to miss what their story is really asking of us.

Begin with the name itself. The dearest name to Allah is Abdullah, the servant of Allah, and that name is not reserved for scholars or leaders. It is a description of what every believing heart is meant to be. Before these four men were jurists or governors or interpreters of the Qur'an, they were servants, and that is the part of them that is open to you. You may never narrate a hadith or issue a ruling, but you can live, today, as a servant of Allah, doing the next small thing because He is your Lord and you belong to Him. That is the whole meaning of the name, and it asks nothing of you that you do not already have.

Look, too, at how Allah divided their gifts. One was given knowledge, one love of the sunnah, one detachment from the world, one courage. Not one of them held all four. We waste so much of our lives wishing we had someone else's portion, mourning the strength we were not given. Their lives answer that quietly: give what you have been given, fully, and trust Allah with the rest. The community did not need four identical men. It needed each of them to be sincere with the share that was his. Your own share, whatever it is, is enough to serve Allah with, if you will offer it without holding back.

Then there is the way they carried disagreement. Four sincere men, one storm, four different paths, and not one of them a traitor. In a time when difference of opinion so quickly curdles into suspicion and contempt, their example is a discipline for the heart: to assume the best of a believer who fears Allah and yet reaches a different conclusion than yours, to argue without betraying, to differ without tearing the fabric of the community. That is harder than it sounds, and it is an act of faith, because it

requires you to trust that Allah, not your own certainty, is the one who finally judges.

And underneath all of it is the lesson of the long, faithful life. The men who died early were honored, but it was the ones who endured, who lived through the trials without breaking and without selling their religion, who carried the inheritance to us. Endurance for the sake of Allah is its own kind of worship. Most of us will not be asked to face civil war. We will be asked to keep believing, keep praying, keep telling the truth and keeping our trusts, through years that grow long and seasons that grow hard, when it would be easier to drift. The Abdullahs ask whether your faith is built to last that long. The good you can do today is small and concrete: hold to one obligation you have been neglecting, the way Ibn Umar held to the sunnah; preserve and pass on one thing you have learned of your religion, the way these four preserved what they received; assume good of one believer you have been quick to judge. Do it as a servant, for Allah, expecting your reward from Him and from no one else.

May Allah be pleased with the four Abdullahs, and with every servant who has carried this religion forward, and may He write us among those who serve Him with the share He has given, who endure for His sake, and who hand on what they received until the very name we are called by is the one He loves most: His servant, and nothing besides.

This chapter follows the account of the four Abdullahs (RA) in the introduction to that set within Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). No Qur'an verses were quoted in the source session, so none are cited here. Where the histories carry

more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abdullah ibn Ja'far

The Son of the Man of Two Wings

There are companions whose lives can be told in a single scene, and there are companions whose lives are a thread pulled taut across the whole of early Islamic history, touching every great joy and nearly every great sorrow. Abdullah ibn Ja'far (may Allah be pleased with him) was the second kind. He was born a refugee in a foreign land, carried as a child across the sea to the city of the Prophet ﷺ, raised in the household of the Prophet's own family, and made to live through more grief than most hearts are asked to carry. And through all of it, he was loved. By the Prophet ﷺ. By the companions. By Allah, who chose his family for hardship and promised them what hardship is worth.

To follow his life is to be reminded that Allah sometimes places His most beloved servants in the path of difficulty, not because He has forgotten them, but because He has chosen them.

A child born in exile

Abdullah did not begin his life in Makkah, though Makkah was where his people came from. He was born in Abyssinia, in the land the early Muslims called Habasha, far across the water from the city of his ancestors. He was, in the truest sense, the child of persecuted refugees. His parents had fled there, with the first of the believers, to escape the cruelty of Quraysh, and so the only world the young boy knew was the world of exile. By blood he

was a Meccan. By birth he was a stranger in a strange land, and that strangeness was the price his parents had paid for their faith.

His father was Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, the cousin of the Prophet ﷺ, the man the Prophet ﷺ loved and adored, the one chosen to stand before the Negus, an-Najashi, and speak for the Muslims. It was Ja'far whose eloquence and wisdom had secured a place of safety for the believers in that distant kingdom, Ja'far who answered the king with such grace that the whole future of the faith in exile seemed to rest on his tongue. His mother was Asma bint Umayy (may Allah be pleased with her), a woman whose own name runs through the seerah again and again. This was the family into which Abdullah was born, and this was why he was born so far from home.

There is something here worth pausing over. We sometimes imagine the migration to Abyssinia as a brief detour, a few months of waiting. It was not. The believers settled there for years. Long enough to put down roots. Long enough that children were born and grew, knowing nothing of the city their parents whispered about. Abdullah was one of those children. His earliest memories were not of the Kaaba but of an African shore, and the warmth of a climate that was simply, to him, home.

The crossing, and the embrace

Then came the day he was placed on a boat. Not, as a Meccan child might have dreamed, to sail back to Makkah, for he had never seen Makkah. The boat was bound for al-Madinah, the city to which the believers had migrated, the new center of the world his parents lived for. He boarded it as a child, with his father Ja'far and his mother Asma, and they crossed the hard and

uncertain waters until at last they reached the shore of a life he had only heard about.

And what he saw when they arrived, he would never forget. He watched the Prophet ﷺ run to his father. He watched the Prophet ﷺ take Ja'far into his arms. And he heard the words the Prophet ﷺ spoke, words that placed his small family at the very heart of the community's joy: that he did not know which to rejoice over more, the return of his cousin Ja'far or the victory at Khaybar, for the boats had arrived in the same season as that great conquest.

Imagine being that child. You are not yet old enough to understand the weight of what you are seeing, and yet you can feel it. You are not merely one more follower arriving to join a movement. You are family. The Prophet ﷺ does not greet you the way he greets a stranger; he weeps over your father, he draws your household close, and from your first moment in the city you are watched over with a tenderness reserved for his own blood. A boy who had known only exile suddenly found himself inside the most loved circle on earth.

The man of two wings

The peace did not last, because peace rarely does in the life of those Allah is preparing. Word came from far to the north, from the land of Jordan, from a battlefield called Mu'tah. The Muslim army had met a vastly greater force there, and among the fallen was Ja'far, the boy's father. He had carried the banner until both his arms were cut from his body, and he had died holding the cause aloft with nothing left to hold it with. He was one of the most famous of the martyrs of Mu'tah, killed in the most gruesome way a man can be killed, thousands of miles from the city where his son now waited.

So the child who had been born in exile and carried across the sea was now, in Madinah, a boy without a father. His family grieved. His mother wept. And once again the Prophet ﷺ came to their door, but this time not in joy. He came with tears in his eyes to hold the grieving household, to embrace the boy, to tell him that he was loved and that he would be cared for, that Allah would keep him under His divine protection. The arms of the Prophet ﷺ closed around a fatherless child, and that was the promise made over him.

But Allah had given the family something to set against the loss. The Prophet ﷺ told them what he had seen: that Ja'far was flying in Paradise. The arms that had been severed on the field of Mu'tah had been replaced by Allah with two wings, with which Ja'far now moved through the Gardens. From that day, the people of Madinah had a new way of greeting his son. They would say to him: welcome, and greetings, to the son of the man of two wings. He would carry that name through the rest of his life, a name born from his father's wounds and his father's reward. The son of Dhul Janahayn, the son of the one who flies.

Sit with what this means for a moment. The very same event that took his father from him was the event that lifted his father into Paradise. The wound and the wing were one and the same. To the eyes of the world, Ja'far had been hacked down far from home. To the eyes of Allah, he had been given flight. And his orphaned son would spend his life being greeted by the proof that nothing given to Allah is ever lost, only transformed into something better than the body could have held.

A childhood at the center of everything

Abdullah's life did not slow after that. If anything, it gathered speed, sweeping him through one momentous chapter of Islamic

history after another. His mother Asma, the widow of Ja'far, married Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), the closest companion of the Prophet ﷺ. So the boy now grew under the care of the man who would become the first khalifah. It was Asma who gave birth to Abdullah's half-brother, Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr, and she gave birth to him on the road to Hajj, at the Miqat, as the household traveled toward the Farewell Pilgrimage with the Prophet ﷺ himself. In this way even the great Hajj of the Prophet ﷺ became part of Abdullah's own story, woven through his family.

Then Abu Bakr passed away. Asma washed his body with her own hands. And in time she married again, this time to Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him), who was the boy's uncle. So Abdullah, born in Abyssinia, orphaned at Mu'tah, raised in the home of Abu Bakr, now grew further in the household of Ali. And as he grew older, his bond to that family deepened in another way still, for he would marry the daughters of Ali, joining a love that Ali himself was known to cherish, that the sons of Ja'far should marry the daughters of Ali.

He was about ten years old when the Prophet ﷺ passed away. This matters. He was not an infant who would later be told what had happened. He was old enough to be fully aware. He had been aware of the crossing from Abyssinia to Madinah. He had been aware of the martyrdom of his father. He had been aware of the Prophet ﷺ stepping into the void that his father's death had left, and now he was aware, with a child's piercing clarity, of the death of the Prophet ﷺ himself. By the age of ten he had already seen the world remade and unmade more times than most people see in a lifetime.

The weight of Karbala

If his early life had been marked by tragedy softened always by love, his later life would be marked by tragedy of a deeper and more terrible kind. For Abdullah married Zaynab al-Kubra (may Allah be pleased with her), the daughter of Ali and Fatimah, the sister of al-Hasan and al-Husayn. And so when the catastrophe of Karbala came, it came into his own house.

He lost sons there. The painful martyrdom of al-Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet ﷺ, and the captivity that followed, the captivity of the women of the Prophet's family, touched Abdullah directly, because Zaynab was his wife and it was Zaynab who was taken captive in the aftermath of that day. There is no way to soften this. The boy who had once watched the Prophet ﷺ run to embrace his father now watched, as a grown man, the family of that same Prophet ﷺ slaughtered and led away in chains, and his own wife and his own children were among those who bore the wound. The thread of his life, which had passed through so many sorrows already, now passed through the deepest sorrow of all.

And it did not end there. After Zaynab, Abdullah married Umm Kulthum bint Ali (may Allah be pleased with her), another of the daughters of Ali, and she too met a tragic death, which he was made to witness. A man who had buried his father, his Prophet, his sons, now buried more of those he loved. One begins to understand why Dr. Omar Suleiman says that Allah chooses certain families for difficulty. This was such a family, and Abdullah stood at the meeting point of nearly all its grief.

An ending fit for the thread of his life

There remained the question of how such a life would end. And the answer, fittingly, was bound up with the Hajj, the pilgrimage that had already threaded through his family's story.

In the year 80 after the Hijra, there came an event the histories call al-Jahhaf, the flood that swept away. It was not a wide and general flood. It was a storm that struck a small valley, sudden and vicious, and it struck during the days of Hajj, while the pilgrims were preparing themselves for the standing at Arafah. The storm tore through the valley and carried away the pilgrims of that year along with their belongings. Many of those who had come to that Hajj, though not all, died in those waters. And among them was Abdullah ibn Ja'far.

Consider the whole arc of it. He was born to persecuted migrants in Abyssinia, far from the Makkah of his blood. He crossed the sea by boat to Madinah, a migration unlike any other companion's. His father died on a distant battlefield in Jordan and was given wings in Paradise. The Prophet ﷺ, who had embraced him as family, died in Madinah while he was still a boy. His wife was carried into captivity at Karbala and his sons were killed there. His next wife died a tragic death before his eyes. And at the last, in the eightieth year after the Hijra, he himself was taken from this world while answering the call to the House of Allah, drowned among the pilgrims as they made ready for Arafah. From exile to pilgrimage, from a foreign shore to the valley of Hajj, his life was a single long journey home, and Allah took him on the road.

This is the man who appears on an old scroll, the kind some of the descendants of this blessed family pass down through the generations. At the top of it: the possessor of two wings, Ja'far. Beneath him: Abdullah, his son. Beneath Abdullah: Ali. And the line descends, name after name, through the centuries, down to a Palestinian family in Nablus, and from there to a mother who hung that scroll above her bed and kept it there long after she had passed. There is something quietly moving in that: the son of

the man of two wings, named on a scroll over a sleeping child's mother, the long memory of a family that Allah chose for both sorrow and honor.

What Abdullah's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel the weight of it as something far away, a chronicle of tragedies belonging to a holy family in a distant age, with nothing to ask of us. That would be a mistake. The life of Abdullah ibn Ja'far is not a museum of other people's grief. It is a question put directly to our own iman.

The first thing it asks is whether we believe, truly believe, that Allah does not abandon those He tests. Look again at the shape of Abdullah's life. Persecution, exile, the loss of his father, the loss of his Prophet, the slaughter at Karbala, the death of his wives, and at last his own drowning on the way to Hajj. By any human accounting this is a life crushed by misfortune. And yet at every turn there was Allah's care wrapped around it: the embrace of the Prophet ﷺ over a fatherless boy, the promise that Allah would keep him, the wings given to his father, the death that came while he was reaching for the House of Allah. The hardship was real, and so was the nearness of Allah inside it. Our faith is asked to hold both at once, to trust that when difficulty comes upon us, it is not a sign that Allah has turned away, but may be the very mark of His choosing.

The second thing it asks concerns the wings. The same sword stroke that killed Ja'far is the one that gave him flight. The world looked at Mu'tah and saw a man torn apart far from home; Allah looked and saw a servant rising into the Gardens. This is the promise that should reshape how we measure our own losses. What looks, from the street, like ruin may be, in the sight of Allah, the doorway to something better than the thing we lost. So when

you are stripped of something you loved for the sake of obeying Allah, of comfort, of ease, of a plan you cherished, do not be so quick to call it loss. Ask instead what wings Allah may be fashioning from the wound. He does not take from His servants without intending to give them more.

And the third thing it asks is patience that does not curdle into complaint. Abdullah did not choose his trials, but he carried them, and he carried them as a man whose hope was anchored beyond this world. This is contentment with the decree of Allah, rida, the willingness to say that whatever Allah has written is good even when our eyes cannot yet see the good in it. Most of us can manage gratitude when life is gentle. The harder, rarer faith is to stay steady when life is not, to hold to Allah through the very losses that tempt us to ask, bitterly, why. Abdullah's life asks whether our trust in Allah is deep enough to survive the things we fear most.

So take something small and real from him into your own ordinary life. The next time hardship presses on you, before you ask why, turn first to Allah and say that you trust Him. When you are made to give up something for His sake, give it as Ja'far gave his arms, expecting that Allah keeps what is given to Him. And when the days are heavy, remember the boy who lived through more sorrow than most and was loved through all of it, and let his life teach you that the path of the beloved is not always the easy path, but it is always the path that leads home. May Allah be pleased with Abdullah ibn Ja'far, and with his blessed family chosen for sorrow and honor, and may He grant us a measure of their trust and gather us in their company.

This chapter follows the account of Abdullah ibn Ja'far (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). No Qur'anic

verse is quoted, as none was cited in the source; the references to Ja'far's two wings and to a family chosen for difficulty yet promised reward follow the narration as related in the lecture. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Umm Kulthum bint Ali

The Granddaughter of the Prophet ﷺ

There are lives in this religion that announce themselves with great events, and there are lives that move quietly in the background of great events, holding them up. Umm Kulthum bint Ali (may Allah be pleased with her) lived the second kind. She was born into the most honoured family on earth, married to one of the greatest men of this ummah, and present at moments that shaped the early Muslim community. Yet she never sought a single line of attention for herself. She was content to be a daughter, a wife, a mother, a helper of the poor, and to carry, in her own blood, a thread that reached all the way back to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

Her story is, from beginning to end, marked by loss. And it is precisely in how she carried that loss, without bitterness, without complaint, leaning the whole time on her Lord, that her faith speaks to ours.

Born at the edge of an era

She was the younger daughter of Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) and Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet ﷺ. That single sentence already places her at the centre of everything. Through her mother she was the granddaughter of the Prophet ﷺ. Her sister was Zaynab. Her brothers were al-Hasan and al-Husayn. She was born so late in the life of the

Prophet ﷺ that she arrived only shortly before his passing, almost certainly too young to carry any memory of his face. The grandfather whose lineage she carried in her veins, she would know mostly through the love and the grief of those around her.

So her life begins where many of these stories begin to ache: at the edge of an era that was closing. The light of prophethood was leaving the world just as she entered it. What remained to her was the family that light had raised, and a community learning how to live after him.

A marriage built on the love of the Prophet ﷺ

When she reached the age of marriage, a proposal came from a man whose name carries enormous weight: Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), by then the leader of the believers. He came to her father Ali and asked for her hand.

Ali had two hesitations. The first was the gap in age, for Umar was much older. The second, and the one more often reported, was that Ali had quietly reserved his daughters in his heart for the sons of his brother Jaffar. He had done the same when Zaynab married. But Umar pressed his request with a striking promise. He said, in effect: let me marry her, for by Allah, you will not find a man on the face of the earth who will care for her companionship more than I will. It was not only that he wished to marry her. He was pledging, before anything else, to treat her well. And at that, Ali answered simply, "Then let it be."

What makes this marriage so moving is the reason Umar gave for wanting it. When he married her, his joy was such that he came to the companions and said, "Congratulate me." They were puzzled. People married all the time; weddings then were not the grand affairs we know. Was a marriage really worth such an

announcement? And Umar explained that this was no ordinary union. He had heard the Prophet ﷺ say that on the Day of Judgment every lineage and every connection would be severed, except his own lineage and his own connection. By marrying the granddaughter of the Prophet ﷺ, Umar had bound himself, by blood and by marriage, to the one bond that would not be cut.

He even named what he had heard. The Prophet ﷺ had spoken of three things that would be severed on that Day: every sabab, meaning every cause or circumstance a person earns; every nasab, meaning every lineage of children and grandchildren; and every sihr, meaning every bond of marriage. All three would be cut off, the Prophet ﷺ said, except those that connected back to him. On that Day no lineage will help, the mother crying for herself and the child for himself, every soul alone. And Umar, hearing his own people whisper that he had married a young woman, set the record straight. He said he had not married her for her youth. He had married her because of what he had heard from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He had already earned one bond as a companion of the Prophet ﷺ. He had another through his daughter Hafsah, who had married the Prophet ﷺ. What remained was this last connection, and now, through Umm Kulthum, he had secured it. He wanted, on the Day when every rope is cut, to still be tied to the Prophet ﷺ.

It is told that the dowry Umar gave was generous, set high to honour her lineage, and that he treated her household with a special dignity, as he honoured her brothers al-Hasan and al-Husayn in the same spirit, giving them what their father deserved out of reverence for the blood of the Prophet ﷺ that ran in them.

In the background of great moments

Umm Kulthum bore Umar two children. Think for a moment about how the threads of this family weave together. Ali became, through this marriage, the father-in-law of Umar, and the grandfather of Umar's children. The Prophet's own household and the household of Umar were now joined. These are the quiet connections that the early community lived inside, names braided into names, all of them circling back to the Prophet ﷺ.

And in some of the most famous incidents narrated about Umar, Umm Kulthum is there, in the background, doing good without seeking to be seen.

Umar was known to patrol Madinah at night, checking on the corners of the community he was responsible for. On one of these night walks he came upon a worn, beaten tent on the outskirts of the city. Outside it sat a man, plainly distressed, and from inside came the sound of a woman moaning in pain. Umar asked the man what was wrong. The man, not knowing he was speaking to the leader of the believers, told him to mind his own affairs and move along. But Umar insisted, gently and then firmly, that he wanted to help. At last the man admitted that his wife was giving birth, alone, inside the tent. They were travelers. They knew no one in the city, had no food, no supplies, nothing but the tent they had pitched on the edge of Madinah.

Umar went home. He came to his wife, Umm Kulthum, and called her by an honouring name, "O daughter of the noble ones," and asked her, "Do you want some good that Allah has driven your way?" She said, "Of course. What is it?" He told her of the woman in labour, and asked her to come and help. Then this man, the commander of the believers, gathered flour and animal fat and supplies, lifted them onto his own back, and walked out into

the night with his wife, the granddaughter of the Prophet ﷺ, to serve two strangers camped in the dirt.

She went into the tent and helped the woman deliver her child. Umar, outside, told the husband to build a fire, and began to cook for him with his own hands. At one point Umm Kulthum called out from inside, "O leader of the believers," telling Umar to give the man the good news that his wife had borne a son and that she was well. Only then did the man understand who had come to him in the dark: the khalifah himself, cooking his dinner, while the khalifah's wife knelt inside a stranger's tent helping a poor woman give birth. Umar told the man to take the food in to his wife, and to come to him the next day so that he could give him money and arrange a regular provision for the newborn child.

There is a whole sermon in that single night, and none of it was spoken. Neither of them felt themselves above this work. Umm Kulthum could have leaned on her lineage; she was the blood of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. She did not. Umar could have leaned on his rank and his standing before Allah. He did not. The most honoured woman in the city and the most powerful man in the state spent a night on their knees in the dirt for two travelers whose names history did not even record. That is what nobility looked like in that house. It looked like service.

A different measure of dignity

Another small incident shows the same spirit from a different angle. Umar had appointed someone as a governor, and the man returned carrying containers of butter and honey gathered for the benefit of the Muslims. When Umar reviewed everything that had been brought, he asked whether anything was missing. He was told that two vessels were missing, that his own daughter, Umm Kulthum, had requested them. It was a small thing. She was the

granddaughter of the Prophet ﷺ; surely no one would begrudge her two jars.

Umar would not let it pass. He asked the traders to estimate the value of what had been taken. He went to the two vessels, found that only the top of the honey had been used, and asked what that portion was worth. They said about three dirhams. So Umar took three dirhams and paid for it himself. The family of the Prophet ﷺ, he was saying with that gesture, does not take from what belongs to the Muslims. We operate by a different and higher measure of dignity. The honour of the blood she carried did not entitle her to more of the world. If anything, it bound them both to want less of it.

Widowed, and widowed again

Then came tragedy, the first of several. Umar was attacked and stabbed many times, and Umm Kulthum was among those nursing his wounds as he lay dying. She was still young. She was the mother of his two young children. When he passed away, she returned home a young widow with two little ones to raise. The man who had pledged that no one on earth would care for her companionship more than he did was gone, and she carried the loss the way this family carried everything, without a recorded word of complaint against the decree of Allah.

After Umar, Ali returned to what had always been in his heart, and married her among the sons of his brother Jaffar. She married one of them, and he died. She married another, Muhammad ibn Jaffar, and he died too. Three times now she had been a widow. And then Ali married her to yet another of Jaffar's sons, Abdullah, whose first wife, her own sister Zaynab, had by then passed away, so that the marriage was permitted.

So this one woman, who had begun as the wife of the leader of the believers, went on to marry three of the sons of Jaffar. The mother of those young men, Asma bint Umays, was herself one of the famous women of that generation, a widow several times over, who had been married in turn to Jaffar, then to Abu Bakr, then to Ali. All three of these husbands of Umm Kulthum were Asma's sons. And Umm Kulthum said something about this that is quiet and almost unbearable in its tenderness. She said, "I am shy before my mother-in-law. Two of her sons have died while married to me, and I am afraid that her third son will die with me as well." Two of this woman's sons had died as her husbands, and she carried it not as bitterness at her own fate but as shyness, as worry, for the grief of the mother who kept giving her sons.

The night she died

Allah decreed, in the end, that it would not be the third son who died first. It would be her.

There was a dispute one night among the tribe, a fight that broke out late in the dark. Her son Zayd, the son she had borne to Umar, by now grown, went out to break it up and make peace between the people fighting. In the middle of trying to stop the violence, Zayd was struck in the head, and he died. They came to her that same night and told her: your son went out to solve people's problems, stepped between them to stop the fighting, and was struck down and killed. She began to weep, and she died that very same night.

One more sorrow in the household of the Prophet ﷺ, and the last of them for her. Of all the children of Ali and Fatimah, she was the last to go in this way.

The next morning, the funeral prayer was held for the mother and her son together. Abdullah ibn Umar led it, and from how that prayer was arranged the scholars later took rulings on how to pray over a woman and a man at once: the son, Zayd, placed nearer the imam, and Umm Kulthum placed ahead of him, with the imam standing at the middle of her body and at the head of her son's. So they were prayed over side by side, mother and son, and buried together.

Look at everyone Allah placed in her life. The daughter of Ali and Fatimah. The granddaughter of the Prophet ﷺ. The wife of Umar. The sister of al-Hasan and al-Husayn, and of Zaynab. She witnessed the closing of the age of prophethood as an infant, came of age as the bride of the leader of the believers, nursed his dying wounds, was widowed again and again, and was finally taken from this world on the same night she lost her son. Through all of it, the records preserve a woman of dignity and patience and quiet service, never once standing on her lineage, never once complaining of her Lord.

A bond that silenced a slanderer

There is one more story worth telling, because it reaches forward to us. In a time of strife there was a man who had embraced Islam and then, in the confusion of that strife, began to curse the companions of the Prophet ﷺ, imagining that he was somehow honouring the family of the Prophet ﷺ by doing so. It is a contradiction that collapses the moment you look at it, for the family of the Prophet ﷺ loved his companions. Ali loved the companions of the Prophet ﷺ. You cannot revile the people he loved in the name of loving him.

Someone walked up to this man and said to him, simply, "Do you realise that Ali married his daughter to Umar, and that Umar had

children by her, the grandchildren of the Prophet ﷺ?" The man was stunned. He said, "Really? I did not know that." And that one fact, that this marriage had happened, that these two great families were bound by love and not enmity, broke something open in him. He repented. He spent the rest of his life, it is said, seeking forgiveness from Allah, giving charity, and weeping over every time he had let his tongue loose against the companions of the Prophet ﷺ.

Her marriage, her children, the quiet braiding of her blood into Umar's house, became, generations later, a single sentence that pulled a man back from the edge. She never sought to teach anyone anything. Her life simply was the lesson.

What Umm Kulthum's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life so full of grief and feel only pity, or to read a lineage so exalted and feel only distance. Both would miss what her life is actually asking of us.

She was given the most honoured blood on the earth, and she never once used it to lift herself above another human being. She knelt in a stranger's tent in the dirt. She let her father pay three dirhams rather than take a little extra honey. When the world would have understood her claiming privilege, she claimed service instead. That is a quality you can carry into an ordinary life today: to refuse to let whatever you have been given, your name, your status, your knowledge, your good deeds, become a reason to look down on anyone. Real nobility before Allah does not announce itself. It bends low and helps. Ask yourself where you have been quietly trading on your standing, and choose, once this week, to serve instead, for the sake of Allah and with no one watching.

She was steadfast under a weight of loss that would crush most hearts. Husband after husband taken from her, and finally her own son in the same night she died, and through all of it not a recorded word of complaint against her Lord. Her peace was never in her circumstances, because her circumstances gave her almost nothing to hold. Her peace was in Allah. This is the heart of contentment with the divine decree: to believe that the One who is taking is the same One who gives, and that He is never unjust, never careless, never absent. When your own losses come, and they will, her life asks whether your trust in Allah can survive the removal of the very people and comforts you lean on. Hers could, because she had leaned, all along, on Him.

And notice what Umar was really chasing when he married her, because it is the thing we should be chasing too. He had heard that on the Day of Judgment every bond is cut except the bond to the Prophet ﷺ, and he spent his joy and his dowry to secure it. We cannot marry into the family of the Prophet ﷺ. But the door to that same bond is wide open to every one of us, through love of him, through following his way, through sending salah upon him, through living the religion he carried to us at such a cost. On the Day when lineage will not save the son from his mother, the one connection that will hold is the connection to him, and through him to Allah. Build that bond now, deliberately, while it is still day. Send salah upon the Prophet ﷺ today and mean it. Revive one part of his sunnah you have let go cold. Guard your tongue from the people he loved, his companions and his family alike, the way that slanderer learned, too late and then just in time.

So take from her what an ordinary life can hold. Serve someone below your station for the sake of Allah and tell no one. Meet your next loss without a complaint against your Lord. Tie yourself a

little more tightly, this very day, to the Prophet ﷺ and to the God who sent him, because that is the one rope that will not be cut. May Allah be pleased with Umm Kulthum bint Ali, the granddaughter of His Messenger ﷺ, raise us upon a measure of her patience and her humility, and gather us with the family and the companions of the Prophet ﷺ on the Day when no other bond remains.

This chapter follows the account of Umm Kulthum bint Ali (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed. No Qur'anic verse is quoted, as the lecture cites a hadith on the severing of all bonds except those of the Prophet ﷺ rather than a specific verse.

Zaynab bint Ali

The Voice That Would Not Break

There is a kind of courage that shows itself with a sword in the hand, on a field, in the noise of battle. And there is another kind, quieter and in some ways harder, that shows itself in a woman standing in a tyrant's court, stripped of everything, having buried her sons and her brother on the same day, and refusing to give the tyrant the one thing he wants most: the sight of her faith collapsing. Zaynab bint Ali had the second kind. When everything had been taken from her, she still had her tongue, and she still had her certainty in Allah, and with those two things she answered power in a way that history could not forget.

To meet her, you have to begin where her family always begins, with the understanding that the household of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was destined for a difficult life on this earth.

A household chosen for hardship

It is one of the strange and heavy truths of this religion that the people closest to the Prophet ﷺ carried the heaviest weight. His wife lost her wealth and her health and died of the persecution before they could even reach Madinah. His uncle Hamza was brutally killed. His cousin Ali walked the road of trial all his life. The Prophet ﷺ himself taught that the most severely tested of all people are the prophets, then those nearest to them in rank, and that he was the most tested of the prophets. The principle behind

it is not cruelty. It is elevation. The greater the test, the greater the reward. You cannot read the lives of the family of the Prophet ﷺ through the narrow lens of worldly justice, because by that measure their lives make no sense: tragedy after tragedy, with hardly a pause. You can only understand them if you understand that Allah was raising their rank by what He allowed them to suffer.

Zaynab was born into that household. She was the third child of Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) and Fatimah (may Allah be pleased with her), the daughter of the Prophet ﷺ. Her brothers Hasan and Husayn came before her, one in the third year after the Hijrah and one in the fourth in the way the historians arrange it, and she was born around the fifth year after the Hijrah. She was given the name Zaynab, almost certainly after her aunt, Zaynab bint Muhammad ﷺ, in keeping with the way names repeated through this family from generation to generation. She was a small child while her grandfather ﷺ still lived, old enough to have known the light of his presence the way her brothers knew it, before he passed and her mother passed soon after him.

So she carried, from the very beginning, the blood of the Prophet ﷺ. And with that blood came the inheritance that was never wealth or ease, but trial, and the rank that Allah grants through trial.

The qualities the histories preserve

Her own biography is strangely hard to assemble. The women of these stories lived private lives, and the entries about them are short, a few lines where you would expect chapters. But even in those few lines, the same words keep appearing. She was intelligent. She was wise. She was steadfast. She was eloquent. The historians call her the noble, dignified woman, and one of

them names her the intellect of her house. You are not given a long catalogue of her deeds. You are given a character, and then you are left to imagine the life that grew from it.

When she reached the age of marriage, her father married her to Abdullah ibn Ja'far, his nephew, the son of Ja'far ibn Abi Talib. There is a tenderness in that match that is easy to miss. Ja'far was the companion whose arms had been cut from him on the battlefield of Mu'tah, and the Prophet ﷺ had given glad tidings that Allah had granted him two wings in Paradise in their place. He came to be remembered as the man with two wings. And so when people would greet his son Abdullah, they would say, "Welcome to the son of the man with two wings." Into that house, built on a martyr's sacrifice, Zaynab came as a wife, and she bore her children: Ali, Awn, Abbas, Muhammad, and a daughter, Umm Kulthum.

Abdullah ibn Ja'far was immensely wealthy, so wealthy that he was nicknamed a very pillar of generosity. And here is the thing about Zaynab and her husband that the histories want you to see. They had every door of the world open to them, and they turned away from it. She became known as the mother of orphans, because she asked for a house to be built where orphans could be cared for. She became known for feeding the poor and the elderly, which carried a special meaning in her family, for the very name of her clan, Banu Hashim, came from the breaking of bread to feed the masses. A woman of real wealth chose, instead, a life of restraint and giving.

That detachment was not a small thing, and it was not an accident. It was a preparation. When the doors of the world open to a person and that person walks away from them, the world loses its grip. And the one who has already let go of the world is

the one who can endure when the world is taken by force. Zaynab divorced herself from comfort long before comfort was torn from her, and that is part of why, when the worst came, it could not bend her.

The night before the worst

When her brother Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him) set out from Makkah toward Kufa in Iraq, Zaynab insisted on going with him, and she brought two of her sons, Awn and Muhammad. It is important to understand what kind of journey they thought they were making. They were not riding out to a battle. The people of Iraq had written to Husayn, bag after bag of letters pledging their support, calling him to come and assume the leadership that was his by right. He was not taking an army. He was taking his family and a small band of the devoted, expecting to be received by thousands of swords sworn to protect him. No one in that small caravan packed for a massacre.

What they found instead was a siege. And on the night before the killing, when it had become clear that death was coming for them, Zaynab spoke to her brother in words that carry the whole grief of her life. She said how she wished her own death had come before this, that she had already lived through the death of her mother, then her father, then her brother Hasan, and now she stood once more before death, this time the death of Husayn. He was the one who remained, the successor of those who had gone and the hope of those still living. She did not want to watch him die.

And here is the beauty of Husayn on that night. He was the one carrying the impossible weight of the coming slaughter, and yet he was the one comforting everyone. He turned to his sister and told her not to let grief strip away her steadfastness, not to let the

sorrow take her patience from her. He took an oath from her: that she would not tear her garment for him, that she would not strike her own face in mourning, that she would not cry out with words of woe and ruin if he was killed. In the end, he reminded her, we return to Allah, and our home is not in this world. It is one of the most moving exchanges the histories preserve, a brother walking knowingly toward death, and using his last calm to steady the sister he was leaving behind.

When the day came, Zaynab did not only stand firm. She watched her son be killed. She watched her brother Husayn be killed. She watched another of her sons be killed. And it is related that she was the one who shielded the surviving son of Husayn, the lone male survivor of that day, covering him with her own body while her own sons and her own brother were being cut down around her. She kept the oath. She did not break.

Now you cry

What makes Zaynab unforgettable is what she did after the swords had stopped. She had a tongue, and she used it with a precision that struck harder than any weapon, and she aimed it carefully.

Her first anger was for the people of Kufa, and here it is worth remembering that this is about a political moment and a particular climate, not about a people in their essence, for great scholars and great believers would come out of that same land. But in that hour, the men who had summoned Husayn had abandoned him. It is related that she saw older men watching the catastrophe from a distance, weeping on a hillside and calling out, "O Allah, send down Your help," while they did nothing. She called out to them: O enemies of Allah, why do you not come down and help, rather than stand back and cry? It is not enough for you to weep.

That question reaches across the centuries and lands on us, too. You are not always as helpless as you tell yourself you are. Tears are not the same as action.

And when, after the massacre, the people of Kufa began to weep and lament over the dead, she gave them words they could not have wanted to hear. Now you cry, she told them. Now you weep much and laugh little. Your tears mean nothing to us now. It is a hard truth, and a needed one: that delayed grief is no substitute for help that was withheld when it mattered, that people do not always want your condolences after the moment when you could have stood with them and did not.

Then came the court, first of Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad, who had the severed head of her brother before him and was prodding at it, and later of Yazid in Damascus. The arrogance of those scenes is almost beyond belief. The men who held power looked at the granddaughter of the Prophet ﷺ, held as a captive, and tried to humiliate her with words. One of them said to her, in effect, all praise to Allah who disgraced you, who killed you, who exposed the lie of your cause. To say such a thing to the granddaughter of the Prophet ﷺ, while toying with the head of his grandson, is a measure of how deranged power can become.

And Zaynab answered. She began with the same word her tormentor had begun with. All praise to Allah, she said, who honoured us with the Prophet ﷺ and purified us from all filth. The disgraced, she told him, are the liars and the immoral, and that is not us. When she was asked, with that same sneering cruelty, how she had seen Allah deal with her family and her brother, she answered without a tremor: I have seen nothing but good. I have seen nothing but good.

Think about what that defiance is. It is not bravado. The tyrant did not only want to torture the body; he wanted to see her faith buckle, to watch her question her Lord. And she would not give it to him. She took all the bitterness she felt toward the people who had betrayed and butchered her family, and she turned it, instantly and flawlessly, into gratitude toward Allah. She was abandoned by the Arabs, abandoned by the Muslims, abandoned by the world, and her mouth filled with praise of Allah. There was no crack in her certainty. That is not merely courage. That is iman. That is a heart so anchored in Allah that no power on earth can reach it to break it.

What became of the tyrants, and of her

It is worth pausing on what happened to the men who did this, because Allah's justice does not always wait for the next world. The young man who toyed with the head of Husayn was beheaded himself within about a year, his own head played with on the very same day, as he had done to another. Before even that, the world had begun to fall apart around him: his wife cursed him until he divorced her, and when he went to his own mother, she turned him away, saying, leave me, you filthy one, for I see no place for you except the Fire, because of the audacity you showed toward the family of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. The tyrant flexes his power over people while everything behind him quietly crumbles. For the believer, the hardship of this world is only the beginning of delight to come. For the tyrant, the brief triumph of this world is only the beginning of a torment that does not end.

The captives, the women and children of the household of the Prophet ﷺ, were marched from Iraq to Damascus, made to travel with the head of Husayn carried before them on a stick. There is

no measuring that pain. And there, in the court of Yazid, when one of the men present looked toward Zaynab's young niece, Fatimah bint Ali, and demanded her, it was Zaynab who rose with words again. O son of the freed ones, she said, naming with a single phrase the lineage of those who had been spared by the Prophet's amnesty on the day Makkah was conquered. Is it for the likes of you to take the daughters of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ as captives, while your own women sit secluded in their chambers? She had outrage. She had a fierce sense of justice. And she never once lost her clarity, never once let the anger spill into anything that compromised her faith.

After that, history grows quiet around her. She returned to Madinah, and the accounts then divide. Some say she lived out a still life there and was buried in Madinah. Others tell that she was urged to leave, lest her presence in the city of the Prophet ﷺ put her at risk, and that she made her way to Egypt, where she was received and honoured, consulted by the people, loved for her nearness to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, until she passed away and was buried there. There are shrines attributed to her in more than one land, and the histories cannot settle the matter with certainty, in part because there were three women named Zaynab among the daughters of Ali, and their stories blur together. We do not know exactly where she rests. But we know how she lived: a life of great dignity and greater tragedy, a woman who lost almost everyone and never lost her Lord. We ask Allah to send His peace and blessings upon the Prophet ﷺ and his family, and to be pleased with her.

What Zaynab's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read a life like this and feel only awe, to place Zaynab so high above us that her courage has nothing to ask of

an ordinary person whose hardships are so much smaller. That would be a mistake. Her life is not a monument to admire from a distance. It is a question pressed against our own iman.

She turned bitterness into praise, instantly. This is the heart of what she teaches, and it is the hardest thing. When the cruelty came and the taunting came and the loss was total, her tongue did not reach for despair or for blame against Allah. It reached for Alhamdulillah. Most of us, when something small goes wrong, when a plan fails or a person disappoints us or the decree turns against us, let the bitterness sit in our hearts and shape our words. She shows another way: that you can grieve the wrong done by people and, in the same breath, refuse to let it touch your certainty in Allah. To say "I have seen nothing but good" while standing in the wreckage of your life is not denial. It is trust. It is contentment with the decree of the One who never wrongs anyone. Ask whether your own faith is anchored deeply enough that a real loss could not pull it loose.

She let go of the world before the world was torn from her. The wealth was there, and she walked away from it toward orphans and the hungry. That detachment was the quiet preparation that made her unbreakable later, because the tyrant could not threaten her with the loss of things she had already given up. Here is the lesson for an ordinary life now: the more your heart is tied to comfort, to status, to being thought well of, the more the world has to use against you. Loosen that grip on purpose, before life loosens it by force. Give something away you would rather keep. Let go of needing the world's approval. The one who has already handed the dunya back to Allah cannot be ransomed by it.

She knew that tears are not enough. She looked at men weeping while they failed to act, and she called it what it was. That voice should make us uncomfortable, because we live in an age full of people moved to feeling and slow to do anything. When you see wrong and your heart aches, her life asks the next question: and then what did you do? Even a small thing done for the sake of Allah is worth more than a flood of feeling that changes nothing.

So take her into your own ordinary day. The next time the decree turns hard, before you complain, try her word: Alhamdulillah, and mean it, knowing Allah has seen and Allah will not waste it. Loosen your hands from one thing you are clinging to, and give it for His sake. And when your heart is stirred by some wrong, do one concrete thing about it, however small, for Allah and not for the watching of people. That is how a captive in a tyrant's court remained free: her body was held, but her faith was hers, and no one could take it. May Allah be pleased with Zaynab bint Ali, the voice that would not break, and grant us a measure of her certainty, and gather us with the household of His Prophet ﷺ on the Day when the only safety is faith.

This chapter follows the account of Zaynab bint Ali (may Allah be pleased with her) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The transcript cites no Qur'anic verse by chapter and verse, so none is quoted here; Allah's promise is referred to in prose. Where the histories carry more than one narration, particularly of her final years and resting place, the differing reports have been noted rather than resolved.

Loving Husayn and Hating Yazid

A Sunni Heart Between Love and Hate

There are stories that stir so much in us that the harder task is not learning what happened, but learning what to do with our own hearts afterward. The story of al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him), the beloved grandson of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, is exactly that kind of story. When you read of the betrayal, the loneliness, the thirst, the gruesome martyrdom at Karbala, something rises in you. Grief rises. So does anger. And the question that follows is honest and urgent: where do these emotions belong, and where is the line a believer must not cross?

This is not a chapter that adds heat to a subject already heavy with heat. It is a chapter about how to feel rightly. How a Sunni Muslim is to love al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him) without limit, hate the injustice done to him without poisoning the soul, and carry both of these in a heart that stays anchored in the creed and turned toward Allah. The companions and the family of the Prophet ﷺ were people of maximum love and maximum sincerity. To honor them is not only to mourn them. It is to let their lives govern our love and our hate.

Why we come to him after so many others

The series that gave us this account began with the very first people to accept Islam, told in the order of their belief. The first

family of the Prophet ﷺ was honored at the very start, their virtue and their value made plain. So a reader might wonder why al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him) is reached only now, after so much else has been told. The answer is that this season turns to the young companions, the children of companions, and builds the story out from their vantage point. It happens that the first of these young ones are the beloved members of the household of the Prophet ﷺ, and we are tracing their lives.

It also happens that this telling arrives with the month of Muharram, and with Muharram comes Karbala, and with Karbala come heated emotions, hateful comments, tension. The path taken here refuses all of that. The lives of these noble and blessed people are not occasions for the spilling of bile. They are occasions to draw out lessons, to increase our faith, and to learn from Allah Himself a redefined notion of victory and success.

What victory really means

This is the first thing the death of al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him) teaches, and it reaches far beyond his story. We tend to measure victory by who is left standing in this world. Allah measures it differently. A person can be killed in this life while seeking out the ideals of truth and virtue for the sake of Allah, and that person is victorious. A person can stand triumphant in this world, successful and unharmed, on the path of Allah, and that person is victorious too. The deciding thing is not survival. It is whether one's life and death were given to Allah.

By that measure al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him) did not lose at Karbala. By that measure those who killed him did not win. There is a way of seeing in which the murdered grandson of the Prophet ﷺ was victorious over every one of his killers, because his death was martyrdom. The righteous dead are

received into Paradise. Their killers, dying unrepentant in their crime, meet a miserable ending in this life and a more miserable punishment in the next. This is not a comfort we invented to soften a wound. It is the lens Allah gives, and once you look through it, you can hold grief and hope at the same time without either one canceling the other.

It is the same lens worth turning on our own age. When we watch the people of Gaza losing their lives over years of killing, the question of who has truly won is not answered by counting the standing and the fallen. It is answered by whose life was poured out for the sake of Allah. Karbala is not a sealed event in a history book. It is a way of seeing that travels into every age of injustice and refuses to let the believer call the martyr a loser.

The first question: do we curse Yazid?

When the martyrdom of al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him) is told, a question comes up again and again, and it deserves a clear answer rather than a rushed one. What is the Sunni position on cursing the man in whose reign this crime occurred?

Begin with what is not in dispute. Yazid ibn Muawiyah is not a companion of the Prophet ﷺ. He is not a man of virtue. He is not someone we love. He carries a terrible record: the killing of al-Husayn, complicity in his murder that no honest reading of history can fully wash away, terror rained down upon the people of Madinah with many killed, terror brought to Makkah itself. A person who has faith does not love such a man. When Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal was told by his son that some people claimed to love Yazid, he answered with disbelief: does anyone who has faith, does anyone who loves Allah, love Yazid? How could a believer love a man with so much crime on his hands, with such a

legacy of tyranny? That sets the floor of the discussion. There is no path to loving him, and no scheme of mind, however cleverly arranged, that can absolve him entirely of the blood of al-Husayn.

So why, then, is there any difference among Sunni scholars over cursing him? The difference is not about Yazid's worth. It is about the act of cursing itself, and about a principle of caution. Imam Ahmad, when asked why he did not curse Yazid, did not answer by defending the man. He answered, when have you ever seen your father curse anyone? His refraining was the refraining of a man who did not curse, not the silence of a man who admired the cursed.

Other great scholars of the same school gave a different and considered reason for holding back the curse. The crime is terrible. Yet the door it could open is dangerous. We know from the example of those who repented late in life, even after grave sins, that a person's final state can change. The principle these scholars reached for was a principle of safety: we do not know with certainty that the man did not repent before he died, and a curse named upon an individual is a heavy and final thing. Better, they said, to refrain. Not out of love for him. Not out of any softness toward the murder of al-Husayn. Only out of caution before the unseen.

And it must be said plainly that there was no unanimity even here. Among the same scholars of the school of Imam Ahmad, there were those who held cursing Yazid to be permissible and wrote at length defending it. Others, surveying the long historical record, gave what amounts to a conditional curse: if he did not repent, if nothing at the end of his life changed, then let the curse fall. The point worth carrying out of all of this is simple. You do

not have to whitewash the crime, and you do not have to pronounce the curse, to stand squarely inside how Sunni scholars handled this. The majority refrained. Some cursed. But none absolved him, and none used the discussion of restraint to belittle or downplay the murder of al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him). Hate has its boundaries. The crime keeps its full weight.

The second matter: how far do we love Husayn?

If hating Yazid is governed by caution, loving al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him) has no such ceiling. This love is part of our faith.

Consider what a Sunni Muslim does in every prayer. At the end of the salah we send peace and blessings upon the Prophet ﷺ and upon his family. To utter those words five times a day and yet feel nothing for al-Husayn would be a strange deficiency, the kind that calls the whole state of one's heart into question. The Prophet ﷺ told us that Allah loves those who love his family, and he commanded the ummah to love them as we love him ﷺ, which is to say, to love them for his sake and for the sake of Allah. There is no contradiction buried in that, because Allah loves what the Prophet ﷺ loves, and the Prophet ﷺ loves what Allah loves. The two loves run in the same direction.

Strip away the martyrdom entirely and the love would still stand. Picture only what the books of history record of ordinary days: the Prophet ﷺ lifting this child, kissing him, holding him, the plain joy the boy brought into his grandfather's life. Remember who his grandfather was, who his mother Fatimah and his father Ali were (may Allah be pleased with them). That alone would be reason enough to feel a deep attachment to al-Husayn. But the martyrdom is also there, the terrible crime committed against him

in the very history of this ummah, and so the heart is pulled in every direction at once. We love him. We say it without embarrassment. We attach ourselves to him.

The fear that some carry is that such love, pressed too far in the reading of Karbala, might spill past the boundaries of creed. So they ask whether we should dim the story down, soften it, hold it at a careful distance so that grief does not curdle into something forbidden. The answer is not to dim the love. It is to keep it pointed where it belongs. We venerate al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him) as a pious human being, beloved and honored, a member of the household of the Prophet ﷺ whom Allah and His Messenger loved. That love is safe precisely because it knows what he is: a servant of Allah we are blessed to love, not a deity, not a partner in worship. Kept there, the love can be as deep as the heart can make it, and the deeper it runs the better.

Commemoration, and the example of Uhud

The third matter is how this memory should be held, and here the example of the Prophet ﷺ himself is the surest guide.

There is the day of Ashura, with its own established virtues. When the Prophet ﷺ came to Madinah and found the people fasting in connection with the deliverance of Musa (peace be upon him) from his enemy, he affirmed that fast. So we fast, and there is real virtue in the day. At the same time, the martyrdom of al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him) disturbs us, stirs us, troubles the soul. The genuine question is how to hold both: the fast tied to the deliverance of Musa, the virtue of the day, and alongside it the painful sacrifice at Karbala, without forcing one to silence the other, and without crossing from honoring the righteous into a devotional commemoration of death.

For this, look at how the Prophet ﷺ and the companions carried their own deepest grief. Uhud was a shattering loss. They lived for years afterward. Yet there was no annual ceremony of mourning for Uhud, no yearly commemoration of the martyrs of that day, no devotional anniversary built around the killing of Hamzah (may Allah be pleased with him). And still Uhud was vividly present in their memory and in their hearts. It surfaced as life unfolded. Companions would suddenly weep while eating a meal, because they would look down at their food and their clothing and remember the day when there was not even enough cloth to cover the body of Hamzah after he was martyred. The memory moved them deeply. It was carried, honored, woven into how they understood every later trial. It was simply not turned into an annual devotional rite.

That is the balance offered to us. We do not hold devotional commemorations of death, not for the passing of the Prophet ﷺ whom we love above all, not for the tragedy of Uhud, not for any of the great wounds of our history. But we keep these tragedies in living memory, and we let them speak to the present. None of this minimizes Karbala. The martyrdom of al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him) is not a small thing. It is among the greatest tragedies ever to strike this ummah. By Allah, we love him, and we draw near to him, and we keep the memory burning, while keeping it inside the bounds the Prophet ﷺ himself observed.

A grave, and a transgression answered with transgression

There is a small story worth pausing on, because it shows what goes wrong when emotion is let off its leash. It was told by a father in his eighties, a man who had watched a great deal of history pass before his eyes, who remembered some people coming to the grave of Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him)

and insulting Abu Bakr and Umar (may Allah be pleased with them). That is, on its own, egregious and disgusting. But then another group, hearing the insult, answered it by insulting in return, with words so vile they could not even be repeated.

Sit with what happened there. A transgression was met with a transgression. Two wrongs, and in the exchange a great deal was lost on both sides. This is the danger that has always shadowed Karbala and everything around it: that love and grief, righteous in themselves, get spent as fuel for cursing, division, and sin. The cure is not to feel less. It is to govern what we feel. To channel love and hate in a way that is spiritually productive, that stays within the boundaries, and that lifts us toward Allah rather than dragging us into the gutter of mutual abuse. That is the whole project of a Sunni heart between love and hate: not to numb the emotions, but to discipline them until they serve the soul.

What loving Husayn and hating Yazid asks of our faith

It would be easy to read all of this as a lesson in balance, a tidy intellectual settlement, and walk away merely informed. That would waste it. The real question this whole matter puts to you is about the state of your own heart before Allah, and what your love and your hate are actually for.

Begin with love, because it is the larger thing. You are asked to love al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him) and the household of the Prophet ﷺ, and to love them for the sake of Allah and for the sake of His Messenger. This is the secret the discussion turns on. Love that is truly for Allah is safe, fruitful, and unlimited, because it is pointed at Him. Love that drifts loose from Allah, that becomes about a faction or an identity or a grievance, curdles. So examine your own loves. The people you admire, the causes you weep for, the loyalties you carry: are they

tethered to Allah, loved because He loves what is good, or have they become little idols of feeling, loved for their own sake? Tie your love back to Allah, and it can be as deep as the sea. Cut it loose from Him, and even love of the righteous can lead a person astray.

Then there is hate, and here the lesson is harder and more humbling. You are allowed, even required, to hate injustice and to refuse to love a tyrant. But notice how the scholars governed their own hatred: with caution, with restraint, with a refusal to let righteous anger spill into cursing and sin. They hated the crime and would not minimize it, yet many held their tongues from cursing the criminal, out of fear before the unseen judgment of Allah. There is a discipline in that which most of us lack entirely. Our age makes hatred cheap and loud. The believer is asked to make it rare, measured, and clean. Ask whether your anger at wrongdoing draws you nearer to Allah and keeps you just, or whether it has become a license to transgress, to insult, to answer one sin with another. The grave of Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) and the ugly words traded over it are a warning written for us.

And take from al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him) the redefinition of victory, because you will need it. Most lives do not end in worldly triumph. Most good deeds go unrewarded by the world. Sooner or later you will give something for the sake of Allah and see no return for it, or stand for the truth and watch it cost you. In those moments the world will whisper that you have lost. Karbala answers that whisper forever. The one who is killed seeking the truth for Allah is victorious. The one who suffers for His sake has not been defeated. What looks like loss in the eyes of people may be, in the record of Allah, the very thing that wins.

Let that settle the fear that doing right will leave you with nothing, and let it free you to act.

So carry one concrete thing out of this into an ordinary day. Send your peace and blessings upon the Prophet ﷺ and his family in your next prayer with a heart that means it, and feel, even briefly, your love for al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him). Refuse one moment of cheap hatred, hold your tongue from one insult you could justify, and keep your anger clean and for Allah alone. And the next time you do good and the world ignores it, remember that your Lord does not measure as the world measures. May Allah be pleased with al-Husayn, and with the household of the Prophet ﷺ, send His peace and blessings upon the Prophet ﷺ and his family, allow us to connect to their spirit of sacrifice and carry it in our own lives, and guide us to the righteousness that causes Him to be with us.

This chapter follows Dr. Omar Suleiman's discussion of loving al-Husayn (RA) and the Sunni perspective on Yazid, Karbala, and Ashura in his series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The transcript cites no specific Qur'anic verse, so none is quoted here; the themes of victory, martyrdom, and the love of the Prophet's household are presented in prose. Where the histories carry more than one report, the most widely transmitted has been followed.

Husayn ibn Ali

The Master of the Youth of Paradise

There are lives we read to escape into the past, and there are lives we read to understand the present. The life of Husayn ibn Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) is the second kind. To tell it well is not to transport you back fourteen centuries to a battlefield in Iraq. It is to set you down in your own time, among your own choices, and to ask what you would have done, and what victory really means when the numbers are against you and the powerful have already decided how the story ends.

He was the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the second son of Ali and Fatima, the last of the household to die a death the Prophet ﷺ himself had been shown, and wept over, while the child was still small enough to ride on his chest. To understand the weight of Karbala, you have to begin where the Prophet ﷺ began with him: with love.

The two sweet flowers

Husayn was born, by most accounts, in the fourth year after the Hijra, less than a year after his brother Hasan. Some narrations say Fatima carried Husayn almost immediately after giving birth to Hasan. They grew up bumping into one another in the Prophet's mosque, falling over each other into his lap, two boys so close in age that they were practically twins in the eyes of the city.

When Hasan was born, Ali had wanted to name him Harb, which means war, and the Prophet ﷺ gave him a name no Arab had carried before: Hasan, from beauty and excellence. When the second boy came, the Prophet ﷺ named him Husayn, the diminutive, little Hasan, and that name too was a gift, for no one had been called Husayn in that exact form before.

The Prophet ﷺ called the two of them his two sweet basil plants of this world. The image is worth pausing on. When he held them, he would draw them in the way a person breathes in a flower, kiss them, hold them tight, and what he loved was their scent. There is a tenderness in that detail that no summary can carry. This was not a distant patriarch dispensing blessings. This was a grandfather who buried his face in the necks of two small boys because he could not get enough of them.

He said of them that they were the masters of the youth of Paradise. One narration describes him seated, Hasan and Husayn jumping on his chest, trying to knock the wind out of him, and the Prophet ﷺ laughing and saying, how can I not love them when they are my two sweet basil of this world. He held the crying baby once and said this young man of mine is a master, and it may be that Allah will bring together two great groups of believers through him. He entered the mosque another time and said, whoever wants to look at the master of the youth of Paradise, let him look at this one.

He loved them together, and he loved them each alone. Once he found the two boys wrestling, and rather than separating them he cheered Hasan on. When someone asked, are you preferring Hasan over Husayn, the Prophet ﷺ began cheering Husayn too, refusing to let either feel less. And on another occasion, holding

Husayn, he said plainly to the community: whoever loves me, let him love Husayn.

A strong heart and a sharp tongue

The two brothers were not copies of each other. Anyone who has raised children knows that you can love them all and still find that Allah has placed something different in your heart for each one, and the Prophet ﷺ loved these two in different ways for the different men they would become.

There is a narration that catches the difference. Hasan once said to his brother, I wish I had some of the strength of your heart. And Husayn answered, and I wish I had some of what Allah gave you of eloquence. Each admired in the other what he himself lacked. Hasan carried wisdom, generosity, the gift of reconciling people, the eloquence that could gather a fractured community. Husayn carried a strong heart, a warrior's courage, a statesman's bearing, and a sense of justice that would not let an injustice pass, not even a small one, not even when it would have been easier to look away. It was even said that in his form Husayn resembled the Prophet ﷺ from the chest down, which the people took as a sign of his strength.

These were the qualities Allah was preparing for two different times. Hasan would be needed to pull the community back from the edge of a long internal war. Husayn would be needed to stand, alone, in front of a tyrant.

The dirt of the land where he would die

The Prophet ﷺ was a man who carried impossible weights with a calm face. He had buried six of his seven children. And he was

given, while he lived, the news of what would happen to the loved ones who would outlive him.

He once entered the house and found Husayn crying, and said to Fatima, do you not know that his crying hurts me. If the ordinary tears of a small child could wound him like that, consider what it cost him to be shown the end. In more than one narration, the Prophet ﷺ was sitting with Husayn when the angel came and asked, do you love him, and he said, of course, and the angel told him that a group from his own community would kill this boy. A group from my community, the Prophet ﷺ repeated, as if the words could not hold the horror of them. How could a community that had seen his eyes soften at the sight of this child ever raise a hand against him? But his life had always been full of the unthinkable. He had been told at the very beginning that his own people would drive him out, and that too had seemed impossible, until fitna came and the impossible happened.

The angel asked if he would like to see the place, and brought him soil from it, red soil, and in one narration he was able to take it in his hand and smell it. They used to say afterward that this was the soil of the land where Husayn would be massacred. Imagine being handed, in your own palm, the very dirt in which a grandchild you are holding will one day be killed and buried. There are nights, the narrations say, when the Prophet ﷺ tossed and turned with the vision of it.

And yet here is what should arrest us. He carried the weight of the burials behind him and the weight of this terrible future, and he still smiled, still moved forward, still spoke to his companions with hope. He never let grief turn into despair, and he never doomed his community with self-fulfilling prophecies of defeat.

That alone is a lesson: a believer can know hard things are coming and refuse to be crushed by them in advance.

Growing up beloved, learning courage from his father

When the Prophet ﷺ died, Husayn was a boy of about six, Hasan about seven. They had lived in the warmth of Madinah, in a house where the most honoured man on earth lit up when they walked in. After his death, the companions could not look at the two boys without weeping, remembering his joy and feeling the fresh pain that he was no longer there to show it.

The community honoured them. There are narrations of senior companions dusting the dirt from Husayn's feet after a funeral prayer, of Abdullah ibn Umar saying openly that Hasan and Husayn were more beloved to his father, Umar, than Umar's own children, because the Prophet ﷺ was dearer to the believers than they were to themselves, and these were the Prophet's own blood.

But the boys did not grow up in comfort alone. They came of age as fitna began to rise. They learned from their father, Ali, how to hold conviction in a storm, and when his caliphate was challenged they rushed to his side and fought alongside him rather than leave him to be wronged. This was the school Husayn was raised in: stand with the one being oppressed, do not be silent before injustice, and let your principles rest on a foundation so deep that no storm can pull them loose.

When Ali was assassinated in Kufa, the caliphate passed to Hasan. And Hasan, to spare the community a long bloodletting, reconciled with Mu'awiyah and brought the people back under one banner. Husayn was not happy with the arrangement, but he trusted his older brother, saw the wisdom and mercy in it, and

submitted. He did not sulk on the sidelines. He put his head down like a soldier, even joining the Muslim army that marched toward Constantinople. For roughly a decade the community knew a hard-won peace and expansion. Then Hasan grew sick and died, most likely poisoned, and a question that had been deferred returned.

Two bags of letters from Kufa

When Mu'awiyah neared death, he did something the Prophet ﷺ had not left behind as the way: he named his son Yazid as successor, securing pledges for him in advance. Yazid was no companion, he was not the best of the people, and this hereditary handing-down was not the process. The senior figures knew it. Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr, Abdullah ibn Umar, and Husayn all resisted. This was kingship dressed as caliphate, and it sat badly with the people closest to the Prophet's legacy.

Mu'awiyah died in the year sixty after the Hijra, and the situation hardened. Many who had objected to the process decided, for the sake of stability and to avoid reopening the wounds of the earlier fitna, to give their pledge and move on. We do not impugn their intentions; many were sincerely trying to make the best of a bad situation. But Husayn and Ibn al-Zubayr would not sign on to it. Summoned in Madinah to pledge privately, both understood that an outright refusal in that moment could mean death. So under cover of night, both slipped out toward Makkah without giving the pledge, making their refusal of that tyranny unmistakable.

In Makkah, the letters began to arrive. From Kufa in Iraq, where Husayn had spent years, where his father had ruled and been martyred, came message after message: come to us, we are ready this time, we will make you our leader. Not one letter or

two. Husayn received hundreds, two full bags of pledges, begging him to come and lead them.

He did not act on excitement. He sent his cousin Muslim ibn Aqil ahead to test whether the people were serious, because Kufa had a long and ugly history of betrayal. Muslim arrived and twelve thousand people came out to receive him, pleading for Husayn, swearing they would not even organize without him. The report came back: the ground is fertile, they are ready.

The hands that tried to hold him back

Then came some of the most painful conversations in this entire history, because the people who loved Husayn most begged him not to go.

Abdullah ibn Abbas, his senior cousin, the scholar of the Quran, came to him and said, I remember what they did to your father, and I fear they will do to you what they did to him and to your brother. He feared Husayn would be killed among his women and his daughters. If the people would not belittle me, he said, I would hold you back by the hair. Abdullah ibn Umar reminded him of words he had heard Ali himself say about Kufa: that he had found them suspicious of him and himself suspicious of them, and found no loyalty or steadfastness in them. When he saw that Husayn was set on it, he embraced him and bid him farewell like a man saying goodbye to someone he knew he would not see again.

Even one of the Prophet's wives, a mother of the believers, wept, and when Husayn came to ask why, she told him she remembered his own mother holding him tight as a child, and swore that if Fatima were alive she would never let him go to this fate.

Husayn was not moving blindly. He had the bags of letters, the report from Muslim, and voices like Ibn al-Zubayr urging him forward. He weighed it, and he believed the support was real. And he said something that reveals the whole shape of the man. Some had told him simply to stay in Makkah and establish himself in the sanctuary. He refused, saying he would rather have his blood shed outside Makkah than turn the sacred precinct into a place of bloodshed. He would not let the Haram be violated on his account. His instinct, it turned out, was exactly right: the tyrants who came after would respect no sanctuary at all.

Karbala

While Husayn made his way toward Iraq, the new caliph sent the ruthless governor Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad to crush the movement in Kufa, and the city did what Kufa always did. The enthusiastic crowds melted away under threat and bribery: twelve thousand became seven, seven became five, then mere hundreds, then tens. Muslim ibn Aqil was hunted down, betrayed, and killed publicly, but not before sending word to warn Husayn of what Kufa had truly become. Their hearts are with you, one man told Husayn on the road, but their swords are with Yazid.

Husayn offered everyone with him the chance to turn back, and many did. Those who remained were fewer than a hundred, only seventy-three of them men able to fight. Among the first to refuse to leave were the sons of Muslim ibn Aqil, who would not go until they had stood with Husayn. He kept moving forward.

He reached a land and asked its name. When they told him, he said, this is Karbala, and recognized in the very word the meanings of distress and affliction and trial. This was the soil the Prophet ﷺ had been shown. An army that grew to five thousand, the last four thousand of them brought by Umar ibn Sa'd,

surrounded a camp of seventy-three, and the strategy was to cut off the water and break them. For three days there were negotiations, and in a piece of cognitive dissonance that should make every heart tremble, the soldiers sent to kill the grandson of the Prophet ﷺ prayed every prayer behind him when its time came.

Husayn offered fair terms: let me return where I came from, or go to Yazid directly and settle it with him, or send me to some remote frontier among the Muslims. But the men whispering in Ibn Ziyad's ear, chief among them a man named Shimr, would accept nothing but total surrender, that Husayn be dragged in chains to kiss the ring. He refused. He told his people one final time that none of them was obligated to stay, and they answered that they would not turn their backs on him.

He spent the last night in prayer, comforting those with him, calming his sister Zaynab in her grief. One of his supplications that night was, O Allah, You are my strength in every distress, and You are my hope in every trial. Then he came out, courageous and strong.

A battle that the raw numbers should have ended in minutes lasted hours. Some on the other side felt the pull of faith and could not bring themselves to kill him; the commander who had first led the thousand-man force defected to Husayn's side, saying he was choosing Paradise over the Fire. But Shimr shouted and incited the rest forward. Husayn watched his own son Ali al-Akbar fall first. He watched a small child of the family struck in the face by an arrow, and cried out in moral outrage, will my child die thirsty. He fought with thirty-four wounds upon him before he was killed, this beloved grandson of the Prophet ﷺ, and seventeen others of the Prophet's family fell with him.

And then a cruelty that strips a person of their humanity: his severed head was carried to Ibn Ziyad, who took a stick and poked at the lips and the eyes, the very lips a companion present cried out that he had seen the Prophet ﷺ kiss. By Allah, the man said, he resembles the Prophet. What is wrong with you. The curses of the people would follow every person who took part in that day, and one by one they met terrible ends; Ibn Ziyad himself was beheaded on the tenth of Muharram exactly one year later, his own head played with as he had played with Husayn's.

What Husayn's life asks of our faith

It would be a mistake to close this story at the body on the ground. Because in the same moment Husayn was killed in this world, his soul was reunited with the grandfather who used to breathe in his scent, the Prophet ﷺ. They could kill his body. They could not touch his soul, and they could not erase what he stood for. That is the redefinition the whole life points toward: victory is not always survival, and defeat is not always death. There is a victory in standing for the truth even when you stand alone, a victory that the powerful, with all their thousands, walked away from having lost.

So ask what this life asks of you, here, now.

Husayn teaches conviction rooted in something deeper than circumstance. His principles held in the storm because they were anchored in Allah, not in comfort or safety or the approval of the crowd. The lecture gives a quiet warning worth carrying: those who crumble under the trial of hardship have usually never conquered the trial of comfort and desire that came before it. If you cannot say no to your own appetite when no one is watching, you will not say no to a tyrant when everyone is. Faith for Allah's sake is built in the small, private refusals long before it is tested in

public. Build it now, in the easy days, so that it holds in the hard ones.

He teaches that you must not be silent before injustice, even small injustice, even when the powerful are on the wrong side. Husayn would not let a property dispute slide simply because the wrongdoer belonged to the ruling party; he invoked the old pact of justice, *Hilf al-Fudul*, that the Prophet ﷺ had honoured, to stand with whoever was wronged. In your own life this is concrete: do not stay quiet about a wrong because the one committing it is powerful, popular, or useful to you. Stand with the wronged person, for Allah, even when it costs you something.

He teaches contentment with Allah's decree without surrendering your courage. Husayn submitted to his brother's reconciliation though it pained him, put his head down and served, and trusted that Allah's wisdom was larger than his own preference. Patience is not passivity, and acceptance of the decree is not cowardice; it is trusting that the One who writes the story writes it better than you would. When life hands you an outcome you did not want, his life asks whether your trust in Allah is large enough to hold steady within it.

And there is one last thing, perhaps the sharpest, that Dr. Suleiman draws out at the end. A man once came to the son of Husayn, asking a fine religious question about the impurity of the blood of a mosquito. Hearing that he was from Iraq, the answer came: you ask me about the blood of a mosquito, while you allowed the blood of the grandson of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ to be shed. Where is your heart. It is a question for us too. When the blood of the believers flows and the sacred places are violated, do not numb yourself with quarrels over the small matters of the religion while the great ones are bleeding. Keep

your sense of proportion. Keep your heart soft. Refuse to grow numb.

Take one thing from him into your ordinary life: one refusal made privately for Allah, so that your principles are anchored before the storm; one moment where you stand with someone wronged though it costs you; one hardship borne without bitterness toward your Lord. That is how a man with seventy-three stood against five thousand and won. May Allah be pleased with Husayn, the master of the youth of Paradise, join us with the Prophet ﷺ and his family and his companions, and never let our hearts grow numb to oppression, nor allow us to become oppressors ourselves.

This chapter follows the account of Husayn ibn Ali (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed. No Qur'anic verses are quoted directly, as none were cited verse-by-verse in the source lecture.

Hasan ibn Ali

The Bringer of Peace

Imagine you are in Madinah, in the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. You are sitting in his masjid, and he is standing on the minbar giving the khutbah, and everything about him, from his face to his voice, holds your full attention. Then a small boy of about three years old breaks loose from the gathering and runs toward the minbar. He is wearing a little red garment, and he is longing for his grandfather, and his grandfather is longing for him. He reaches up with his tiny hands to be picked up, and as he does he trips over the hem of his clothing, falls, strikes his head on the ground, and begins to cry. And the Messenger of Allah ﷺ cannot bear it. He comes down from the minbar in the middle of the sermon, lifts the child, holds him until the crying stops, and asks the congregation to forgive the interruption. Then he holds the boy up before them all and says that this son of his is a master, a leader, and that it may be Allah will reconcile two great groups of the Muslims through him.

That child was Hasan ibn Ali (may Allah be pleased with him), the grandson of the Prophet ﷺ, and the coolness of his eye. To understand the weight of that prophecy, and how a lifetime answered it, we have to go back to the day he was born.

The most awaited child

It was the third year after the hijra. Madinah was young, the wounds of Badr freshly healed, and the Prophet ﷺ had already tasted ease after hardship and knew more hardship lay ahead. He was sitting with his companions in the masjid when people came hurrying with the news: glad tidings, Messenger of Allah, a boy has been born. His face lit up. He rose and rushed out toward the house of Fatima, and the companions rose and rushed with him, wanting to be near him for every moment of his joy.

Pause here, because the joy was not ordinary. This child came from Fatima (may Allah be pleased with her), the most beloved of all his children, the queen of the women of Paradise, the one who resembled him so closely that those who knew them both said they had never seen anyone more like him. Everyone in Madinah understood that the path to his heart ran through his daughter. When she entered a room he stood for her, kissed her forehead, and seated her where he had been sitting; when he entered, she did the same for him. And this was the daughter who had just given birth.

The father of the child was Ali (may Allah be pleased with him), the young man who had stood with the Prophet ﷺ when no one else would, who at eight years old had risen in a gathering and said, "I will stand with you," when grown men sat silent. Ali had been raised in the Prophet's own home; his mother had been like a mother to the Prophet ﷺ, and his father, Abu Talib, had been like a father, the shield who protected him when he was most vulnerable. So this child gathered into himself the two houses dearest to the Prophet ﷺ, the first grandson born to him after Islam, at a time when all of his own sons had died in infancy.

The Prophet ﷺ entered the house, and his first words were, "Give me my son. Give me my son." They brought the newborn to

him, and he held him tight and asked what they had named him. Ali, who loved strong and weighty names, had called him Harb, which means war. The Prophet ﷺ would have none of it. He changed the name on the spot to Hasan, which carries the meaning of excellence and beauty, a gentle kind of goodness. A different strength than Ali had imagined, but a strength all the same. Years later, when Husayn was born, Ali would try the same name again, and again the Prophet ﷺ would gently overrule him. These two names, some scholars say, had never been given to anyone before these two boys.

Then the Prophet ﷺ began the rites we still keep today, learning them from how he treated this most observed of births. He called the adhan softly into the child's right ear, so that the first sound this infant heard was the call to prayer in the voice of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He performed the sacrifice on his behalf, softened a date in his own mouth and rubbed it gently into the mouth of the newborn, and prayed, "O Allah, put blessing in him and make him from the righteous." He commanded that the child's hair be weighed when it was shaved, and silver of that weight given to the poor.

A grandfather's love

What followed was a love so open and constant that it confounded the companions, because they were not used to it. Many of them were stern men of the desert, and tenderness toward children was not their way. Into that world the Prophet ﷺ carried his grandson everywhere, lifting him, kissing him, holding him close, and the sparkle in his eye for this boy never dimmed until the day he died.

Once a man saw the Prophet ﷺ kissing Hasan and said, in genuine puzzlement, that he had ten children and had never

kissed any of them. The Prophet ﷺ answered, "Whoever does not show mercy will not have mercy shown to him." Another companion found him on his hands and knees, with Hasan and Husayn riding on his back, saying, "What an excellent camel you have, and what excellent riders you are."

He would sit down to judge serious affairs, the whole concern of the ummah on his shoulders, and even then he would ask, "Where is the little one? Bring me my son," and they would let Hasan loose to come running, and he would gather him up and say that this child was like his sweet basil in this world. One companion who narrated these things said he could never recall Hasan afterward without his eyes filling with tears, and as he said it, he wept, remembering what he had seen in the eyes of the Prophet ﷺ toward that boy.

This love was not mere sentiment. It was a doorway. The Prophet ﷺ taught that to love his family for love of him was an act of worship and nearness. He would lift Hasan and pray, "O Allah, I love him, so love him, and love whoever loves him," and he would tuck the two boys under his cloak, kiss one and then the other, and say, "These are my two sons. Whoever loves them loves me."

The most striking scenes are the ones in prayer. For a time Hasan was the only grandchild, the small boy who chased the Prophet ﷺ everywhere and clung to him even in salah. When the Prophet ﷺ went into sujud, Hasan would climb onto his back, or part his grandfather's legs and run between them, and the Prophet ﷺ never pushed him away, never broke his prayer, never scolded him. Once he led the congregation and stayed in sujud so long that the companions feared he had died. When he finished, he told them it was neither death nor revelation: the two boys had

climbed onto his back, and he had not wanted to hurt them, so he waited until they were done.

On another day he was giving the khutbah when the two boys came toward him in their little red garments, stumbling and calling for him. He came down, gathered them up, finished the sermon with them in his lap, and recited to the people the words Allah had sent down:

Your wealth and your children are only a test for you. There is great reward with God:

QUR'AN 64:15

Then he said, simply, that he had seen these two and could not hold himself back. He did not pretend the love was anything other than what it was. He named it, and he named it as a test from Allah, and he carried it anyway.

Two masters of the youth of Paradise

One night a companion came late to the Prophet ﷺ and saw a figure before him that he could not identify, neither human nor jinn, a presence that paused and then departed. The Prophet ﷺ told him it was an angel that had never descended before that night, sent with glad tidings: that Fatima is the mistress of the women of Paradise, and that Hasan and Husayn are the two masters of the youth of Paradise.

There is a difficulty in that hadith worth dwelling on. In Paradise there are no ages; everyone is restored to youth. So what does it mean to call two men the masters of the youth of Paradise, when both lived into their forties? The scholars gave more than one answer. The most searching was that Hasan and Husayn embodied every quality for which the young are praised. You

hope a young person's zeal comes joined to courage, and who was braver than Husayn? You hope it comes joined to wisdom, and who was wiser than Hasan? Zeal without courage falters, and zeal without wisdom can do more harm than good, but these two had the fire of youth perfected by the very things that keep fire from destroying. The world needs both. They were not of the same temperament; both were steeped in righteousness, but they answered different needs, and woe to anyone who tries to diminish the rank of either.

When the Christians of Najran came to debate the nature of Jesus, peace be upon him, and could not be moved even though they recognised the truth, the resolution was to invoke the curse of Allah upon whichever side was lying. Allah revealed the command:

If anyone disputes this with you now that you have been given this knowledge, say, "Come, let us gather our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, and let us pray earnestly and invoke God's rejection on those of us who are lying."

QUR'AN 3:61

So the Prophet ﷺ called his family to him. He brought Fatima and Ali, and drew Hasan and Husayn into his cloak with them, and said, "These are my family." This is the hadith of the cloak, and it tells you who these children were to him: not bystanders in the household, but the very family Allah commanded him to present when the truth of his message was on the line.

The empty house

Then the Prophet ﷺ died, and the children had to watch. Hasan was about seven. He had to see his grandfather, the man who

had given him so much love that no companion could recall it without weeping, washed and shrouded and buried. And the pain did not stop there, because Fatima lost the appetite for life after her father's death. He had whispered to her that she would be the first of his family to follow him, and she had smiled, longing to be with him. Only a few months later, this young and healthy woman went out to her courtyard, lay back looking up to the sky, made her final supplication, and died.

So a boy of seven lost his grandfather and his mother in a single terrible season. But the supplications the Prophet ﷺ had poured over him at his birth did not fall to the ground. They held. And Hasan grew into a man who would live out one of the most quietly extraordinary lives in our history.

He grew into a man of staggering generosity. Three times, it is said, he looked at all he owned and gave away half of it for the sake of Allah, so exactly that he kept one of two sandals and gave the other. Twice he gave away everything he had, and at times his wealth ran into the millions. He once overheard a man in the masjid asking Allah for ten thousand dirhams, went home, gathered the sum, and brought it to him. When a servant dropped a vessel and it shattered, the servant trembled and recited, "and those who restrain their anger," and Hasan said, "I have restrained my anger." The servant said, "and those who pardon people," and Hasan said, "I have pardoned you." The servant said, "and Allah loves those who do good," and Hasan said, "You are free, for the sake of Allah." Words long passed down in his name hold that forbearance is an adornment, that dignity is nobility, and that haste is foolishness, and the foolish are the weak.

His memories of his grandfather were few, because he had been so young, and the ones he kept tell you what was planted in him. He remembered taking a date of charity as a small child and putting it in his mouth, and the Prophet ﷺ reaching in and taking it back out, not from anything but love, because the family of Muhammad ﷺ do not consume charity. He remembered being taught, "Leave what causes you doubt for that which causes you no doubt," to trust the alarm in your own heart before anyone tells you a thing is wrong. And he remembered the supplication of the qunut: "O Allah, guide us among those You have guided, and pardon us among those You have pardoned." Integrity, moral discernment, and a prayer to carry for life. That was his inheritance.

The decision that fulfilled the prophecy

Then the fitna came. After Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him) was killed, with Hasan among his most eager defenders, the ummah was torn. When Hasan's father Ali was martyred in Ramadan, the people turned to the eldest son, and there was little discussion: Hasan was given the pledge of allegiance. But he set a condition into it. He would accept it on the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Prophet ﷺ, but also on the understanding that they would make peace with whomever he made peace, and fight only whomever he fought. He sensed already what some around him feared: that he might be a man who stops battles rather than starts them. And he was.

Across the divide stood Mu'awiyah (may Allah be pleased with him) in Sham, and between them lay armies, divided territories, and forty thousand men under Hasan's command who never wanted to stop. Hasan looked at what the fitna had become: blood spilled, families fighting one another, roads unsafe, the

dignity of people trampled. So he made his decision. He would reach out to Mu'awiyah and hand him the leadership, on the condition of peace, an end to bloodshed, no retribution against those who had stood on the other side, the people's rights from the treasury preserved, and his father Ali not cursed. He could have stood and recited his own honours, that the Prophet ﷺ had held him up and called him a master, that he was the coolness of his grandfather's eye. He said none of it. He asked instead how he could quietly stop the killing.

He knew Husayn would see it differently, and Husayn did. But Husayn was noble, and said that Hasan was the elder and the rightful successor, and that even where he disagreed, he would follow him. Mu'awiyah, when the offer came, sent back a blank sheet of paper: "Write your conditions, whatever they are." So Hasan wrote them, and the peace was made.

It cost him. As he stood to tell the army, some refused it. They looted his tent and stripped it bare. One man stabbed him and called him a disbeliever like his father, the same hatred that turns on everyone in turn. Hasan survived, and handed over the leadership before the ummah with grace, reciting to them an entire chapter of the Qur'an to remind the believers of the greater calling that should bind them. They called this the Year of Unity, and what followed was nearly a decade of peace, in which the Muslims could turn outward again, build, and live up to the higher purpose entrusted to them.

And he was mocked for it until the end of his life. They called him the one who humiliated the believers. He answered every insult with grace, saying only that he hated to be the cause of their blood being spilled. He had done exactly what the Prophet ﷺ foretold from the minbar when Hasan was a baby in a red

garment: he had brought together two great groups of the Muslims and reconciled them. He did not champion with a sword. He championed by sitting people at a table and putting the matter to rest for the sake of Allah. And that, the scholars say, is where greatness is truly found: in the one who reconciles, who is the first to be forgotten by history precisely because the peacemaker is never thanked at the time. Both sides feel he did not go far enough for them. He fulfilled the prophecy and absorbed the scorn, and never wavered.

A death without revenge

In Madinah, years later, he was poisoned. The histories are full of conspiracies about who did it, and no single name can be fixed with certainty. He saw in a dream that the words "Allah is the truth" were written between his eyes, and a learned companion told him that if the dream was true, Allah was calling him back very soon. The poison overtook him, and he said he could feel his liver being cut to pieces.

His brother Husayn entered upon him as he was dying and found him smiling. When he asked why, Hasan said he was looking now upon creation he had never seen before, beings all around him, smiling at him. Then he asked to be carried out to the courtyard of his home so he could contemplate the dominion of Allah, and there he looked up to the sky and said, "There is no god but Allah. O Allah, I submit myself wholly to You."

Husayn, with the justice that burned in him, said, "My brother, tell me who poisoned you, so I may take your right." And Hasan refused. "I will never tell you. I leave him, and I will find him on the Day of Judgment, and Allah will take my right for me on that Day." He had a feeling who had done it, and he carried the secret to his grave rather than let one more drop of Muslim blood be

spilled over him. His last wishes were the same: bury him near his grandfather the Prophet ﷺ if it could be done without trouble, and if not, near his mother, and either way, "do not raise your voice in this matter." When some objected to the first resting place and it threatened to stir up commotion, Husayn remembered his brother's words and let it go, and Hasan was buried beside his mother Fatima in al-Baqi.

They say his funeral was the largest Madinah had ever seen, the people coming to honour the man who had always treated them with kindness, who had brought them together, who had spent his wealth upon them. One companion, helping to carry the body, said that the forbearance they were burying was greater than the mountains, that they had never seen patience like the patience of Hasan. He died at about forty-seven, and beside him in al-Baqi lay the mistress of the women of Paradise, mother and son together. From his line came the great scholar Nafisa, a teacher of Imam al-Shafi'i, so that even his lineage went on bringing good to the ummah.

What Hasan's life asks of our faith

It is easy to praise courage. The harder thing, and the rarer one, is to honour the man who laid down a sword he had every right to raise. Hasan's life is a question put to our own iman, and the question is uncomfortable, because most of us would rather be remembered as the one who fought than as the one who reconciled.

He gave up power for peace, and he did it for Allah, not for the praise of people, knowing they would call him weak. This is the heart of the matter. The world will always honour the one who refuses to yield, and it will rarely understand the one who yields for the sake of something higher. When Hasan handed over

leadership to end the killing, he was not surrendering; he was choosing the ummah over his own name, and Allah over the verdict of history. Ask yourself how much of what you cling to, in your arguments and your grudges and your need to be proven right, you cling to for your own sake, and how much you could lay down quietly for Allah, even if no one ever credits you for it. The greatest charity, the Prophet ﷺ taught, is to bring two people together, because no one wants to do it and both sides resent the one who tries.

He answered insult with grace, and refused revenge even on his deathbed. That kind of forbearance does not come from a weak heart; it comes from a heart so full of trust in Allah that it can leave its own rights with Him. "I leave him, and Allah will take my right for me on the Day of Judgment." There is a freedom in those words that most of us never taste, because we insist on collecting our debts in this life. Hasan's life asks whether you believe, really believe, that Allah is a better keeper of your rights than your own anger is.

And he was generous to the point of giving away half of everything he owned, three times, for the sake of Allah, because his chest was wide with contentment and he trusted that what he gave to Allah was not lost but kept. This is the quality to carry into an ordinary life now: the willingness to loosen your grip. To restrain your anger when something breaks and pardon the one who broke it, as he did with his servant. To give something quietly that no one will know about. To be, in one conflict in your family or community, the one who sits people down and says, for the sake of Allah, let us put this to rest, and to bear being misunderstood for it.

So take one thing from him into this week. Lay down one argument you have every right to win. Forgive one debt and leave it with Allah. Give one thing in secret. Be, just once, the bringer of peace that no one thanks. That is how the grandson of the Prophet ﷺ lived, in forbearance, in generosity, and in trust that Allah sees what people overlook, and it is a way still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Hasan ibn Ali, fill our hearts with a measure of his forbearance, and gather us with the Prophet ﷺ, his family, and his companions.

This chapter follows the account of Hasan ibn Ali (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (64:15, 3:61). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Ammar ibn Yasir

The Son of the First Martyrs

Imagine you are in Iraq, decades after the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has passed from this world, and you meet a man in his nineties. His skin is very dark, and he has not dyed his hair, so his beard and hair are fully grey. He wears a black turban, and when he lifts it to make wudu you see that he is missing an ear. And when you look at his body you see things that make you flinch: burns on his chest and back, deep wounds where the flesh is actually gone, swollen welts, scars layered over scars. Most who see him are afraid to ask. But one young man finally does. "What is this? What happened to you?" And the old man answers quietly: these are the traces of what Quraysh used to torture me with, in the heat of Makkah.

His name was Ammar ibn Yasir (may Allah be pleased with him), a man of very few words. If you came near him, you would hear him making dhikr under his breath, seeking refuge in Allah from the tribulations he knew were coming. He had seen everything a man can see, and said almost none of it. This is the story of the body that bore those scars, and the heart that never broke.

A family that came to Makkah by the decree of Allah

Ammar's mother, Sumayyah (may Allah be pleased with her), was born in Abyssinia and brought to Makkah as a slave, owned by a man named Abu Hudhayfah of Banu Makhzum, the same

powerful clan from which Abu Jahl came. His father, Yasir (may Allah be pleased with him), was a man from Yemen, not powerful, not from a great tribe. He came to Makkah for one reason only: a brother of his had disappeared in the city and never returned. Yasir came north with two other brothers searching, asking, "Have you seen this man? Have you seen this man?" When they could not find him, the other two went home to Yemen. Yasir said, "I think I will stay here in Makkah and try to make a life."

So Yasir allied himself to Banu Makhzum, becoming what was called a halif. It was an awkward standing in that society: not quite a slave, but not quite inducted into the tribe either, a person caught in between. Abu Hudhayfah married this loyal man to his slave girl Sumayyah, and from them came Ammar, freed at birth by his master. Then Abu Hudhayfah died, around the time Islam was beginning, before he had embraced it or opposed it. His death left Yasir, Sumayyah, and their children in that same in-between place: broadly under the protection of Banu Makhzum, but among the people who had to keep their heads down, work, and say nothing. If you got into a dispute with anyone of status in Makkah, the fault would be yours, and you would be dragged back down. So theirs were quiet lives. They had another son, Abdullah, so subdued that after he embraced Islam history loses sight of him entirely. Allah knows who he was.

It is one of the wonders of the decree of Allah, this: He brought an enslaved woman from Abyssinia and a searching brother from Yemen and set them down together in Makkah, so that a family would form there, meet the message of Muhammad ﷺ, and give the ummah some of its first stories.

The two who walked in and came out believers

When the Prophet ﷺ began to preach in the house of al-Arqam, Ammar could not keep himself away. He was a young man, strong in body and in mind, doing exactly the work his parents did and exactly what they told him. But the message of one God, after generations of being bent at the feet of idols, was a liberating thing for a man in his position, and he felt its pull. He had heard of Muhammad ﷺ the way the whole city knew him: by his virtues, as the trustworthy one, noble with the weak as he was noble with the strong, an even-handedness that was itself part of the call.

So Ammar walked toward al-Arqam's house, in the careful, secret way a person had to move in those days. At the door he met another young man, Suhayb, walking just as carefully. Each saw the other and stopped. "What are you doing here?" Ammar asked. And Suhayb answered, "What are you doing here?" Then one of them said it: I want to go in and hear what he has to say. And the other said: that is exactly why I am here. So they went in together, and the Prophet ﷺ presented Islam to them in that room, and they walked back out through the door as believers. Two men who would become among the greatest in history stepped through that doorway not believing, and stepped back out enlightened.

Ammar's Islam was very early. In a narration in Bukhari he said that he saw himself with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ when the Prophet ﷺ had only a handful of people with him: a few slaves, two women, and Abu Bakr. Ammar was one of those first souls. And before long it was Ammar himself who carried the message home to his parents. Both Yasir and Sumayyah, so cautious all their lives, accepted it at once, asked to be taken to the Prophet ﷺ, and embraced Islam in private. There is a heaviness in this detail, because later, when their torture began, Shaytan could

whisper to Ammar that he had brought this affair upon their heads.

Be patient, family of Yasir

Abu Jahl, going about persecuting the new Muslims of one tribe and another, learned that a whole family of believers sat right under his nose, among the very weakest of those loyal to his clan. They had no kinsmen in Makkah to forbid harm from reaching them, and no strength to defend themselves. So the chief of that disbelief, in his cowardice, decided to make an example of the most vulnerable people he could find.

They had an actual place for it. They tied this family up in the burning heat of the midday sun, beat them and strung them up in different ways, and made certain that the people of Makkah could hear their cries. The cruelty had two aims: to break the believers into abandoning their religion, and to let the rest of the city watch them break, because there is something poisonous that spreads when people see faith give way. None of this family gave up their din. Not one. And that only made him increase the torture.

What made it harder still was that no one could rescue them. When a believer was an outright slave, Abu Bakr could buy his freedom, as he bought Bilal's. But this family's in-between standing meant their freedom could not simply be purchased, and the Prophet ﷺ was physically restrained from defending them. So he would walk past that display of broken, bloodied, starved people, and weep, and make du'a for them. As they passed, Yasir called out that this was their fate, this was their time. And the Prophet ﷺ gave them the words remembered to this day: "Be patient, O family of Yasir, for your appointed place is Paradise." And they would answer: we will be patient.

Sumayyah was very old, about twenty years older than the Prophet ﷺ, in her sixties. Yasir was older still, in his seventies, already so frail it was said his eyebrows had thinned and he looked to be on the brink of death. And Abu Jahl stepped on them and struck them. He mocked Sumayyah, telling her she only wanted her husband dead so she could marry Muhammad ﷺ. But this small old woman would not be cowed. When he cursed the Prophet ﷺ, she answered him back. When he insulted Allah, she cursed his idols. Everything he threw at her, she returned. What enraged him was the audacity of it, that this puny old woman dared speak to him this way. And finally, as he tortured her, she spat at him. So he took his spear and drove it through her, martyring her in front of her husband and her son.

She was the first martyr of Islam, an old beaten woman from Abyssinia, killed for refusing to let go of her Lord. Imagine the place in Paradise she saw at the very first strike. Ammar heard his mother's last cry. Yasir could not bear the sight, and died almost at once under the torture. That left only Ammar, who had to witness all of it, and live.

A heart fully assured with faith

Ammar was a physically strong man, so his torture lasted longer, because his body could endure more. They beat him until he no longer knew what he was saying. They set parts of him on fire and then put the flames out, and the Prophet ﷺ would walk by, lay his hand on Ammar's head, and pray, "O fire, be cool and peaceful upon Ammar, as you were upon Ibrahim." They held his head under water until he believed he was drowning, then pulled him back. He was burned one day, whipped the next, starved and parched, made to feel death again and again, all while the man who killed his parents walked free.

And in the middle of all this, where he did not even know his own words, Ammar broke enough to repeat what Abu Jahl demanded and say something against the Prophet ﷺ. He was let go, and Abu Jahl had his victory. But those forced words wounded Ammar more deeply than anything done to his body. He came to the Prophet ﷺ weeping. "What is it?" the Prophet ﷺ asked. "Evil, O Messenger of Allah. They did not leave me until I said something against you." And the Prophet ﷺ, wiping the tears from Ammar's face, asked him a single question: how did you find your heart when you said it? Ammar could have said he was confused, out of his mind. He said the truth: my heart was fully assured with faith. At no point did I lose it; I never lost sight of who you are. And the Prophet ﷺ comforted him: if they do it to you again, then say it again.

It was about Ammar, the companions said, that Allah revealed His mercy upon the one whose tongue was forced while his heart held firm:

With the exception of those who are forced to say they do not believe, although their hearts remain firm in faith, those who reject God after believing in Him and open their hearts to disbelief will have the wrath of God upon them and a grievous punishment awaiting them.

QUR'AN 16:106

Then Ammar had to live. For six years in Makkah he walked the streets and saw the man who had killed his parents and tortured him moving freely in his fine robes, surrounded by his wealth and his slaves, gloating. Ammar could not touch him; if he did, he would be killed. So he kept his head down, kept believing, and kept suffering, holding his own hand back until Allah Himself would one day write the reckoning. Imagine knowing the face of

the man who murdered your parents, passing him in the market, able to do nothing.

He carried his grief into worship. The histories say a verse describing the one who devotes the long hours of the night to his Lord was understood to be about Ammar:

What about someone who worships devoutly during the night, bowing down, standing in prayer, ever mindful of the life to come, hoping for his Lord's mercy? Say, "How can those who know be equal to those who do not know?" Only those who have understanding will take heed.

QUR'AN 39:9

It is also narrated that Ammar was the first person to set aside a part of his own home as a place of prayer, a small masjid within the house, and the other companions took up the practice after him. A man with little appetite left for this world filled himself instead with his Lord. Certainty, he is reported to have said, is wealth enough, and worship enough to keep a person busy. He knew where his parents had gone, and where he was going.

Carrying two bricks

The persecution did not leave him even after all of this, so Ammar migrated for the sake of Allah, first to Abyssinia, his mother's homeland, and then, when the Prophet ﷺ signalled where the hijra would be, to Madinah, among the very first to arrive. There is a narration that astonishes: among all the Emigrants, there was not a single one whose two parents were both Muslim, except Ammar. Every other Emigrant had a parent, often both, who was not a believer, and many were openly hostile. Ammar alone could say that both his parents were Muslim, the first two martyrs of Islam.

When the Muslims set about building the masjid in Madinah, Ammar carried twice what everyone else carried, two bricks for their one. The Prophet ﷺ saw him straining and said, "Ammar, why not carry what the others carry?" And Ammar answered, "Because I want double the reward." The Prophet ﷺ honoured him by his mother's name and told him that everyone has a single reward, but he had two. And then the Prophet ﷺ said something that would only make sense at the very end of Ammar's life: that the last thing he would drink in this world would be a sip of milk. As they built, Ammar sang that they were the Muslims building the houses of Allah, and the Prophet ﷺ sang the words back to him. Think of the joy of it, after Makkah, where they could not even find a place to pray in peace.

Ammar was among the people of Badr, and he witnessed every battle alongside the Prophet ﷺ, sent on some of the most sensitive and dangerous missions. He used to say he had fought beside the Prophet ﷺ against both men and jinn, telling of a night on an expedition when an ugly creature came to stop him drawing water, and he killed it, and the Prophet ﷺ told him it had been a shaytan. Once, when people feared Ammar would die of illness, the Prophet ﷺ said no, he would not die; he would be killed by a transgressing party. It was a prophecy about a man who had already survived Abu Jahl: that a long life still lay ahead of him, and that it would end in martyrdom.

The criterion of truth

At the battle of Yamamah, Ammar stood on high ground with his ear hanging by a thread of flesh, blood running from him, and shouted to the Muslims, "O Muslims, are you running away from Paradise?" calling them and the enemy both, fighting to the last. Later a man mocked his cut ear, calling him deformed, and

Ammar said, "You curse the better of my two ears, for I lost it in the path of Allah."

When Umar opened Iraq, he sent Ammar to Kufa as governor and Abdullah ibn Mas'ud as its teacher, writing to its people that he was sending them two of the most beloved companions to him, both from the people of Badr. Yet Ammar lived in the deepest humility. He owned a single garment held by one rope, and when a seller refused him a second rope, he cut his one rope in half to cover himself properly. He governed and kept himself quiet, lost in the worship of his Lord. When Umar later removed him and asked whether it had bothered him, Ammar said it had bothered him more when he was appointed than when he was removed, because of the weight of the position.

Then the fitna came, the time of confusion when the Muslims turned upon one another and trial brought out the worst in people. Through all of it Ammar held himself, and it was said no one was more sincere for the sake of Allah in those days than he was. When the groups split, he pledged his allegiance to Ali, but first he asked a question of principle: what do you say of the children of those who fight against you? And when Ali answered that there was no blame on them, and that the families would never be counted as spoils, Ammar said that had he answered otherwise, he would not have pledged to him. He would only stand upon what was true.

And the Prophet ﷺ had made him the very measure of that truth. More than once he had said that when fitna arises, if you wish to know where the truth lies, look to where Ammar is killed. On the day of Siffin, Ammar was given a bowl of milk. He looked at it, and across the decades he heard the Prophet ﷺ again: the last thing you will drink in this world will be a sip of milk. He drank it,

and went forward saying that Paradise had drawn close, and that today he would at last be reunited with his beloved Prophet ﷺ. He went out in complete peace, and he was killed, ninety-three years old, a martyr, the son of the first martyrs, made by the Prophet ﷺ into the criterion of truth.

The pattern did not end with him. His son Muhammad ibn Ammar grew into a scholar of hadith, and during a later fitna a powerful man asked him to fabricate a hadith in his favour. When he refused, he was killed for it. Ammar's parents were killed because they would not curse Muhammad ﷺ. Ammar was killed as the criterion of truth from Muhammad ﷺ. And his son was killed because he would not lie in the name of Muhammad ﷺ. It is as though Allah chose this one family, across the generations, for a single thing: the truth.

What Ammar's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like Ammar's and feel that it belongs to another world, that scars and spears and burning sands have nothing to ask of us in our quiet lives. That would be a mistake. His life is not a relic to admire. It is a question pressed against our own iman.

Look first at his heart under torture. When his tongue was forced and he came away believing he had betrayed everything, the one question the Prophet ﷺ asked him was about his heart, and the heart had held. This tells us where faith truly lives. It is not in never once faltering on the outside, but in what the heart clings to when everything around it is pressure and pain. You will have days when your worship feels broken, when you slip, when you fear you have failed Allah entirely. Ammar's life says: examine the heart. If it is still turned to Allah, still grieving its own shortfall out of love and not indifference, then the door of His mercy is wide,

and the verse of His mercy was sent down for exactly such a soul. Return to Him and say it again.

Look next at the two bricks. Ammar had every excuse the world would accept to do the minimum and rest. He had buried his parents, survived fire and drowning, crossed deserts twice for his faith. No one would have blamed him for carrying one brick like everyone else. He carried two, because he wanted more of his Lord, not more of the world. That is a hunger we can imitate today without a single drop of blood. It is the extra rak'ah no one sees, the charity you give when you have already given, the choice in small unwitnessed moments to want nearer to Allah rather than to want less effort. Sincerity, ikhlas, was the whole of him: he asked the reward from Allah alone, content that Allah had seen it. Ask how much of your own striving is for the eyes of people, and how much you could quietly do, as he did, for Allah and no one else.

And look, finally, at the patience. For six years Ammar walked past his parents' killer and held his hand, trusting that Allah would write the reckoning in His own time. He did not let bitterness eat his faith, and he did not complain of the decree of his Lord. When hardship comes to you, and an injustice goes unanswered, and you can do nothing but wait, his life asks whether your trust in Allah is large enough to leave the matter with Him and keep worshipping while the answer is delayed. What looked from the streets of Makkah like a ruined family who had thrown their lives away was, in truth, a household Allah was gathering, one by one, into Paradise. What the world counts as loss, your Lord may be recording as the very thing that saves you.

So carry one thing of Ammar's into your ordinary day. Guard your heart when your deeds feel weak, and run back to Allah rather

than away from Him. Carry one extra brick that no one will ever know about. Hold steady through one unanswered wrong without a word of complaint to your Lord. That is how the son of the first martyrs lived, in sincerity, in patience, and in a certainty nothing could burn out of him. May Allah be pleased with Ammar, and with Yasir and Sumayyah before him, raise us upon a measure of their faith, and let us meet our Lord while He is pleased with us, and our Prophet ﷺ while he is welcoming us.

This chapter follows the account of Ammar ibn Yasir (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (16:106, 39:9). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Tamim al-Dari

The Palestinian Companion

There is a man who came to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ from very far away, in the last year of the Prophet's life, carrying a story so strange that the Prophet ﷺ gathered the whole community in the mosque to hear it. He was a Christian scholar from the hills near Hebron, a merchant who had spent his life reading scripture and crossing borders, and on his way to Madinah he had seen something no one else among the companions would ever see. He had spoken, face to face, with the chained creature the Prophet ﷺ had warned them about: the Dajjal, the great deceiver of the end of time. And when the Prophet ﷺ sat on the pulpit that day, he was smiling.

His name was Tamim al-Dari (may Allah be pleased with him), and Ibn Hajar, who compiled the most monumental collection of companion biographies, gave him a title that still belongs to him: the Palestinian companion. To meet him properly, you have to follow the long road that brought a man from the land of Ibrahim, peace be upon him, all the way to the mosque of the Prophet ﷺ.

A truth-seeker from the land of Ibrahim

Tamim was a Palestinian Christian, living in Sham under the Roman Empire, in an age when the empire was working to standardize one creed across all its territories. He was not a priest, not a preacher. He was a well-travelled merchant who led

caravans across distant lands, and in the long summer trade he met the Arabs who came up from Makkah with their goods. From them, in the ordinary back-and-forth of buying and selling, he began to hear the news of a man in Makkah and Madinah who was calling people to one God.

He was a literate, well-read man, known to be scholarly, and above all he was a seeker. He took his religion seriously, and he knew the Torah and the Gospel as they existed in his day. At first he assumed this new movement was simply another form of the idol worship rising all over the region. But as he listened more closely, the pieces would not sit still. Here was a man ﷺ descended from Ibrahim, calling to the oneness of God, who affirmed Jesus, peace be upon him, the very prophet that the well-known tribes of Madinah had refused, and who affirmed the Torah and the Gospel and the prophets of the book. The more Tamim heard, the more his hunger for the truth grew, and the deeper he dug.

The Qur'an places a certain kind of person in a certain category. There were others before Tamim who left everything to follow the truth wherever it led: Salman al-Farisi, who gave up his home in Persia and passed through fire-worship and Christianity and slavery and torture to reach the Prophet ﷺ; and Abdullah ibn Salam, the leading rabbi of Madinah, who surrendered the most prestigious religious position a man could hold the moment the Prophet ﷺ arrived. These were not merely people who recognised the truth. They were willing to endure the cost of recognising it. Of those firmly rooted in the knowledge of the book, Allah says:

They say, 'You have not been sent.' Say, 'God is sufficient witness between me and you: all knowledge of the

Tamim belonged among them: a man of the book, a deep scholar of scripture, whose love of the truth was steadily pulling him out of comfort and toward a prophet he had never met.

The voices that pointed him onward

He did what a careful man does. He went and asked. He came to a rabbi in his region, a man thoroughly versed in scripture, and put the question plainly: where are we in the unfolding of the prophets, and where should a person be exerting himself, as a Jew or as a Christian? The rabbi told him that a prophet was due to come, the one who would bring everything together, and that it made sense he would rise in the land of the children of Ibrahim. He blamed his own people for their denial. This was a prophet, he said, who would affirm Christ and all the prophets, the Torah and the Gospel, and who would call to the way of Ibrahim.

Then Tamim went to a priest, a man learned in Christianity, and the priest admitted something heavy: that they had lost their connection to Christ, that they were no longer practising the religion the way Jesus, peace be upon him, had practised it, and that indeed it was time for a prophet who would put the scattered pieces back together. The people of the book were fracturing along political and theological lines. Both the rabbi and the priest pointed Tamim toward the same horizon: a prophet was coming to make the broken whole.

And then came the strangest confirmation of all, and it came from his own backyard. Near Hebron, in the very land of Ibrahim, there were people from his village who would go out to abandoned valleys and call upon the jinn, seeking refuge in them.

Tamim was with them one day when a voice rose among them. It was a righteous jinn, one who had accepted Islam, and it said: stop seeking refuge in us, seek refuge instead in Allah. Your Lord has sent a message and a messenger, and the news of the heavens and the earth has completely changed. Everything around Tamim, the scholars of two faiths and a voice from the unseen, was converging on the same truth. So in the Year of the Delegations he set out for the Prophet ﷺ, and with him came ten men, among them his brother Abu Hind, also to be counted among the companions.

The chained man in the monastery

It was on that journey that the thing happened which the whole community would gather to hear. The most famous narration of it comes through Fatimah bint Qays (may Allah be pleased with her), who said she heard the caller of the Prophet ﷺ summoning everyone to the mosque outside the time of prayer. They came, the Prophet ﷺ prayed with them, and then he sat on the pulpit, smiling, with a smile larger than his usual one. He told them to stay where they had prayed, no one rising. Then he said: do you know why I have gathered you? They said, Allah and His Messenger know best. He told them it was for no fear and no alarming news, no war declared. He had gathered them because a Christian man named Tamim had come, taken the pledge, and become Muslim, and had told him a story that agreed with what the Prophet ﷺ had already taught them. He gathered them so their faith would be strengthened by hearing it.

This was the story. Tamim said he had been on a boat at sea with thirty men from his tribe when the waves tossed them for a month, until they were utterly lost. At sunset one day they came upon a small strip of land none of them knew. They went ashore,

and there they were met by a beast so hairy and strange that they had never seen anything like it. They cried out, woe to you, what are you? It answered that it was al-Jassasah, and told them to go to a nearby monastery where a man was waiting, eager for their news.

Fearing it might be a devil, they fled from the beast straight into the monastery, and inside they found the largest human being they had ever seen, his hands chained to his neck, iron holds around his legs. They said, woe to you, who are you? He answered: you tell me who you are first. So they told him who they were and how they had come.

Then the chained man began to ask his questions. He asked about the date palms of Baysan: did they still bear fruit? Yes, they said. There will come a time, he said, when they no longer will. He asked about the Sea of Galilee, the lake of Tiberias: was there still water in it? Plenty, they said. Soon it will dry up, he said. Then he asked about the unlettered Prophet: what had he done? Tamim, who already meant to follow that Prophet ﷺ, told him the man had left Makkah and settled in Yathrib, that the Arabs had fought him and he had overcome them, and now they believed in him. The chained man said it was in their interest to follow him.

Then he told them who he was. I am the Masih al-Dajjal, he said, the false messiah. Soon I will be allowed to leave this place, and I will travel the whole earth in forty nights, reaching every part of it except two: Makkah and Madinah. Every time I try to enter them, angels will be standing guard with drawn swords, and they will turn me away.

As Tamim finished, the Prophet ﷺ struck his pulpit and said: this is Tayyibah, this is Madinah. Then he asked the community: does this not agree with what I told you? And they said, yes,

Messenger of Allah, it agrees with everything you told us. Of all the companions, it was the Palestinian one who was permitted to see the Dajjal in this form, and it is hard not to feel the weight of that, given what the end of time will bring out of that very land.

How to hold a story like this

The Prophet ﷺ did not present this as a riddle to be solved. He presented it as a mercy: a man had come from far away and confirmed, before he could be told, the very signs the Prophet ﷺ had already described. The companions understood that. As Islam spread across the world in the years after, not one of them said, let us go find that island. They took it at face value, said Allah and His Messenger know best, and let it strengthen their certainty rather than test it. Just as there are creatures all around you that your eyes cannot see, Allah can peel back a layer of this world for whomever He wishes, whenever He wishes. The aim of the companions was never to chase the unseen, but to worship Allah so truthfully that they served Him as though they could see Him, knowing that even when they could not, He always saw them. Tamim's strange night was not given to satisfy curiosity. It was given to deepen faith, and that is the only way to receive it.

The man who brought light to the mosque

So Tamim entered Madinah with ten men beside him, all of whom had seen the same vision, and he loved the Prophet ﷺ already, not as a political power but as the prophet he had read about and longed for in the scriptures. He came bearing gifts: a fine Arabian horse, a beautiful cloak, and, not yet knowing it was forbidden, a bottle of wine. The Prophet ﷺ did not break it over his head. He simply made it known that this was prohibited in Islam, and turned the moment into one of teaching. Tamim had also brought

five slaves, and when the Prophet ﷺ said he wished to free them, Tamim understood at once: if you free them for the sake of Allah, he said, then I free them for the sake of Allah, and he freed them himself.

But the most beautiful gift he gave was light. There is a well-known tradition that the Prophet ﷺ encouraged the believers, if they could not travel to Jerusalem to pray, to at least send oil to light the lamps of its sacred mosque. Tamim knew his land was rich with olive oil, and he became the first to light oil lamps in the mosque of the Prophet ﷺ, beautifying it with an entire new system of lamps. The Prophet ﷺ said to him: may Allah grant you light on the Day of Judgement. And one of the freed slaves who had come with him took charge of keeping the oil burning, and the Prophet ﷺ gave him a new name: Siraj, the lamp.

Tamim did not collect a title and go home, as many of the delegates did. He stayed in Madinah and gave himself to the Prophet ﷺ in an extraordinary way. He asked the Prophet ﷺ what reward there was for a man who guides someone from the people of the book into Islam, and the Prophet ﷺ told him such a person would be the closest of all people to that man in life and in death. It was a question shaped by who Tamim was: a scholar of the Torah and the Gospel, longing to bring his own people in.

There was also a matter from his trading days that Allah would address in the Qur'an. Before Islam, a bowl of inheritance had wrongly come into his hands through trade; after he became Muslim the matter weighed on him, and two witnesses testified to its rightful owner. This episode lies behind one of the latest verses revealed, the verse of bequest:

You who believe, when death approaches any of you, let two just men from among you act as witnesses to the

making of a bequest, or two men from another people if you are journeying in the land when death approaches. Keep the two witnesses back after prayer, if you have any doubts, and make them both swear by God, 'We will not sell our testimony for any price, even if a close relative is involved. We will not hide God's testimony, for then we should be doing wrong.'

QUR'AN 5:106

A scholar, a worshipper, and a hidden heart

Tamim rose quickly. He brought his old scholarship into his new faith, and some of the scholars say he was the fastest man ever to memorise the whole Qur'an. Though he had caught only the final year of the Prophet's life, he became so thorough a scholar of the Qur'an that he taught companions who had been Muslim from the very beginning. He narrated from the Prophet ﷺ the words that became one of the most famous hadith in Islam: that the religion is sincerity, to Allah, to His book, to His Messenger ﷺ, to the leaders of the Muslims, and to their common people. And he became a living picture of it: the helpful man in the community, the one stringing lamps in the mosque, settling new converts, representing the Prophet ﷺ to delegations.

The Prophet ﷺ once told him: if I had a daughter who was not married, I would have married her to you. There is no higher testimony of character than that. A cousin of the Prophet ﷺ heard it and said, well, I have a daughter, and I am your cousin, and arranged the marriage.

But his greatest distinction was his worship, and the most striking thing about it is how hard he worked to keep it hidden. He was known to recite the entire Qur'an in a single unit of prayer. A man who lived next to him said he would hear Tamim standing all night, sometimes reciting a single verse and weeping over it until

dawn, repeating the verse that asks whether those who commit evil deeds imagine that Allah will treat them like those who believe and do good. Once a man asked him how much Qur'an he read at night. Tamim answered with anger: it seems to me you are the kind of person who reads at night and then tells people in the morning how much he read. I would rather pray three units of witr and tell no one, he said, than recite the whole Qur'an at night and wake up announcing it. When the man was hurt, Tamim softened and explained: if I told you I prayed a great deal and you are a weaker believer, you might despair; and if I told you I prayed little, you might think the companions did not strive enough. This is something between a person and Allah.

It is reported that he once slept through a night of prayer, and as a discipline he vowed not to miss a single night of standing for a whole year. His fame for worship was something he tried to escape, and which found him anyway. In the time of Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), Tamim was given permission to teach on the pulpit before the prayer, and he was appointed one of the two leaders of the night prayer in Ramadan in Madinah. He owned one fine garment he wore to every prayer, in keeping with the command to take one's adornment to the place of worship, and another he wore only on the night he hoped was the Night of Decree, so that when people saw Tamim in it, they would think: if Tamim believes it is that night, then perhaps it is.

What Tamim's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and fix on the dramatic part, the chained man in the monastery, and leave the chapter entertained but unchanged. That would be to miss what his life is actually asking of us.

Begin where he began. Tamim was a comfortable man, a successful merchant of a powerful empire, and he could have let the news from Makkah pass him by. Instead he treated the truth as something worth disturbing his life for. He read, he asked, he weighed what he heard against what he knew, and when the evidence pointed somewhere costly, he followed it. Most of us already sense more than we act on. We know which prayer we are neglecting, which sin we are excusing, which good we keep postponing. His life asks whether you love the truth enough to move toward it before it is convenient, to act on the certainty you already have rather than waiting for a certainty that never quite arrives.

Then look at how he worshipped, because this is the heart of him. Tamim did more than almost anyone and tried to let no one see it. He hid his night prayer the way other people hide their sins, refusing even to say how much he recited, not out of pride but out of a fierce protection of something private between himself and his Lord. That is ikhlas, sincerity, and it is the rarest thing of all: to do the deed for Allah alone, content that He has seen it, with no need for any other witness. In an age that records and broadcasts everything, his life asks a sharp question. How much of your worship could survive being unseen? Could you give in charity that no one will ever trace to you, pray a night that no one will ever know about, and feel that fully rewarded because Allah was watching? Take that as a discipline you can begin tonight: do one good thing for Allah and bury it where no one will find it.

And notice what he did with the light. The man who brought oil to the mosque was promised light on the Day of Judgement, and the slave who tended the lamps was renamed for the light he kept burning. What you quietly do for the house of Allah and for

His servants, He returns to you in a currency the world cannot see. You need only be, in your own small circle, the helpful one, the one who lights a lamp for someone stumbling in the dark, and do it for Allah and not for thanks.

His grave lies neglected today in occupied land, settlers in every direction around it. It is not the sanctity of a grave that matters, but the sanctity of the man and what he stands for: that this earth had its believers long ago, that the truth-seeker is honoured wherever he is buried, and that what is given to Allah is never lost, however the world treats it afterward.

So carry one thing of his into an ordinary day. Move toward a truth you have been delaying. Do one act of worship that no eye but Allah's will ever see. Be the one who quietly brings light to someone else for His sake. May Allah be pleased with Tamim al-Dari, grant him the light he was promised, free the land beneath him and around it, and gather us with him and with our beloved Prophet ﷺ in the company of the truthful.

This chapter follows the account of Tamim al-Dari (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (13:43, 5:106). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Jarir ibn Abdullah

The Yusuf of this Ummah

It was the last Ramadan of the Prophet's life, and the mosque of Madinah was so full that its walls seemed ready to burst. People had come from every corner of Arabia, drawn to the one man the whole peninsula was now talking about. Into that crowded, humming space walked a stranger from Yemen, so tall he stood level with the hump of a camel, his beard touched with saffron, dressed in the finest clothes he owned. The Prophet ﷺ was in the middle of his sermon. He stopped. Every head in the mosque turned. And before the stranger had said a single word, before the two men had ever met, the Prophet ﷺ told the gathering, "The best of Yemen is about to walk through the door, and upon his face is the touch of an angel."

The stranger was Jarir ibn Abdullah al-Bajali (may Allah be pleased with him), and he had been a Muslim for barely a month. Yet he would go on to carry that single sentence the rest of his life, and to spend that life proving worthy of it.

The man molded in perfection

Jarir came from Bajila, a confederation of tribes in Yemen, and he was among their chiefs. He was not one of the great political powers of the age, but he led a people of some thousands, and he carried himself like a man who knew his own worth. He was, by every account, extraordinary to look at. The narrators

describe a face so striking that when he entered a room, all eyes went to him at once. He was tall to the point of imposing, broad, beautifully proportioned, as if, they said, he had been molded in perfection. He kept a saffron dye in his beard and a fragrance about him that people remembered.

The Prophet ﷺ had sent Mu'adh ibn Jabal to Yemen to call its people to Islam, and after Makkah fell, the news of the new faith ran south along the trade roads. Many came to Madinah in those final years with one eye on faith and one eye on politics, eager to ally themselves with the rising power. Jarir was not one of those. His interest was the faith itself. He gathered a hundred and fifty of his tribesmen and set out north, and as he neared the city he stopped, dismounted at a quiet corner, and prepared himself. He bathed, perfumed himself, and put on his best garments. He wanted to be ready for the moment he met the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

So when the whole mosque fell silent and turned to stare at him, Jarir, not yet knowing what had been said, felt the awkward weight of all those eyes. This, he thought, could go very well or very badly. He leaned to a man beside him and asked whether the Prophet ﷺ had said anything about him. The man told him: yes, he stopped his sermon, and he praised you in the best of ways.

Sit on my cloak

What happened next set the pattern for everything that followed. The mosque was so crowded that no one would give up their place near the Prophet ﷺ; in the last Ramadan of his life the companions clung to every inch of nearness to him. So the Prophet ﷺ took off his own cloak, folded it, and threw it toward Jarir. Come close, he said, and sit on this.

Jarir did not sit on it. He caught the cloak, held it against his chest, and began to kiss it. "May Allah honor you, O Messenger of Allah," he said, "as you have honored me." He was already undone by a generosity he had done nothing to earn, from a man who did not yet know him. Then the Prophet ﷺ turned to the gathering and taught them through the moment: "When a noble of a people comes to you, then honor him."

There is a second scene, in the Prophet's own home, that may be the same first meeting or a separate one. The Prophet ﷺ kept only a single cushion in his room, and his habit with a guest was to give them the cushion and seat himself on the bare floor. He gave Jarir the cushion, and Jarir, refusing to be raised above him, sat on the ground. The Prophet ﷺ looked at this chief of Yemen and said something that reached straight into the man's heart: "I bear witness that you are not one who seeks power or corruption upon the earth." From the very first moment, Jarir had walked in not as a king but as a guest, humble, making no mention of himself.

And so a quiet exchange began that the scholars never tired of repeating. Every time Jarir lowered himself, the Prophet ﷺ raised him higher in the gathering. The more Jarir shrank from prominence, the more the Prophet ﷺ drew him forward. It became, for later generations, one of the living illustrations of the prophetic teaching that whoever humbles himself for the sake of Allah, Allah will elevate him. The whole mosque watched a man captivated by their attention, and watched their Prophet ﷺ refuse to let that man think small of himself.

Beautify your character

The Prophet ﷺ understood the danger that lives inside a gift like Jarir's. A man so favored in his appearance can come to rest on

it, to let it stand in for substance. So the advice he gave Jarir cut directly to it: "You are a man whom Allah has made beautiful in creation, so make your character beautiful too."

It is a sentence worth sitting with. The Prophet ﷺ was telling him that the thing the crowds admired was not the thing that mattered. Your real worth, your real value, is not in the face that turns heads. If people are impressed by your form, then know that what impresses Allah is your character, and Allah sees what the people cannot. The gift was an opening, an opportunity, not an achievement. Make the inward presence as striking as the outward one.

Jarir took the instruction to heart, and the rest of his life is, in a sense, the record of him doing exactly that. When the Prophet ﷺ took his pledge, he attached to it a single condition tailored to the man before him. With some he stressed independence; with others, the abandonment of theft and adultery and the keeping of family ties. With Jarir, the Prophet ﷺ took his pledge on the condition that he would always be sincere in his goodwill toward every Muslim. The word the Prophet ﷺ used carries more than the English "advice." It means well-wishing, a heart that wants good for others, from which sincere counsel naturally flows. And of all the companions, the histories carry more stories of Jarir living out that one word than of nearly anyone else.

The horse worth eight hundred

The stories are concrete, and they are strange enough to remember. Jarir once sent a servant to the market to buy a particular horse. The servant returned having bought it for four hundred dirhams, a genuine bargain. Most men would have thanked Allah for the discount and walked on. Jarir did not. "Four

hundred," he said, "does not make sense. It is worth more than that." He had the servant take him back to the seller.

"You sold this for four hundred?" Jarir asked. The man said yes. "But it is not worth four hundred," Jarir said. "It is worth more." Then he began, gently, to bargain upward against himself. Would you be pleased with five hundred? Yes. Six hundred? Of course. Seven hundred? Yes. Eight hundred? Yes. "Then it is worth eight hundred," Jarir said, "so I will give you eight hundred." He handed over a second four hundred dirhams and turned to leave a seller utterly baffled by what had happened. Who comes back to pay double for what he has already bought?

Jarir saw the man's confusion and explained himself. "I am not doing this because I have lost my mind. I gave my pledge to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ that I would be sincere in goodwill to every Muslim, and your horse is worth more than what you sold it for, and I did not want to take advantage of you."

This was simply how he lived in the marketplace. If he was selling and a buyer offered too much, he corrected him downward; if he was buying and the price was too low, he raised it. When he was the buyer, he put himself in the place of the seller; when he was the seller, he put himself in the place of the buyer. He had taken to heart the prophetic teaching that none of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself, and he applied it not only to grand sacrifices but to the small daily arithmetic of trade. As a leader of his people, gifts and provisions flowed to him, and they would reach the poor before he had even, as the narrators put it, smelled them. He cared for the Muslims he could not see, because his pledge bound him to them.

He who resembled the Prophet ﷺ

Jarir had perhaps forty days with the Prophet ﷺ, and some narrations stretch it to ninety. It was a short window, but it left a deep mark on both sides. The Prophet ﷺ, Jarir said, never once looked at him without smiling in his face. In another narration: the Prophet ﷺ never excluded him, never put him behind, always welcomed him in and counted him among his own. To grasp how much that meant, you have to remember how vast and crowded the community had become by then. People were arriving from across the world to be near the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and yet a man who had been Muslim for only weeks felt, every single time, that he was seen and included.

It went further. When the delegations of the Arabs came pouring in to embrace Islam in those last months, the Prophet ﷺ would send for Jarir to be present beside him, and Jarir would put on that same formal garment. It was, Jarir said, as though the Prophet ﷺ would take pride in his presence before the visitors.

Years later, Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) would call Jarir "the Yusuf of this ummah," and he listed the things Jarir shared with the Prophet ﷺ that hardly anyone else did: the beauty of his form, the beauty of his face, his perfume, his clothing, the very way he carried himself. The Prophet ﷺ loved the garments of Yemen, so Jarir's clothes were as the Prophet's clothes; his food as the Prophet's food; his fragrance as the Prophet's fragrance. And then another companion, hearing Umar's list, confirmed every word of it and added a sixth thing: his humility was like the humility of the Prophet ﷺ. That is the detail that turns the whole portrait around. A man could be told he resembled the most beloved of creation and grow proud. Jarir resembled him most in the refusal to be proud.

Composure, and a prayer for a clumsy rider

They said of Jarir that he possessed a rare combination of wisdom and composure, and the two went together. He was never rattled. On the battlefield he stayed calm and collected, as though nothing were moving around him, and that stillness made him a leader men trusted. When a commander of his was killed in the field, he steadied his men with a single sentence: seek forgiveness for him, and Allah will give you another; press on.

The Prophet ﷺ gave him a mission that suited a man of Yemen: to destroy Dhul-Khalasa, an idol-sanctuary that the people there circled and venerated, a place the Prophet ﷺ had once warned would, near the end of time, draw people back to indecency around it. For much of the early period the Prophet ﷺ had let such places stand, out of regard for local sensitivities, but enough of Yemen had now entered Islam. "Will you not relieve me of Dhul-Khalasa?" the Prophet ﷺ asked. Jarir said yes.

But Jarir had a problem, and it is a strangely human one. He was so tall, and his feet so large, that he could not keep his seat on a horse; he kept falling off. He had fought all his battles on foot for exactly this reason. So he came to the Prophet ﷺ and admitted it plainly. The Prophet ﷺ placed a hand on his chest and prayed: "O Allah, make him firm upon the horse, and make him a guide who is rightly guided." It was the Prophet's way to give more than he was asked: Jarir wanted help to stay mounted, and the Prophet ﷺ added guidance and acceptance to the prayer.

What Jarir reported afterward is among the most vivid things in his story. After that prayer, he said, when he rode, it was as if he, the horse, and the wind were a single thing; the horse's legs became like his own feet, and the clumsiness was simply gone. He led his men, destroyed the idol, and the trace of that prayer

would follow him for decades. When, in the wars of Umar's caliphate, the Muslims needed reinforcements rushed to Iraq against the Persians, Jarir brought his people from Madinah in less than two weeks, a journey that should have taken far longer, and the companions attributed the speed to the blessing of the Prophet's prayer over a man who once could not sit a horse.

The heart that wanted no part in fitnah

Jarir's second mission was one of calling, not destroying: the Prophet ﷺ sent him to a wealthy chief of Yemen, and that man accepted Islam and freed four thousand of his slaves as his entry into the faith. Jarir set out back to Madinah with him, full of the joy of bringing such a man to the Prophet ﷺ. He arrived to find that the Prophet ﷺ had died. The grief crushed him. He had been given only forty days, and even a week of that nearness, he felt, had been like a lifetime: taken in at once, treated as family, praised, counseled, and now suddenly bereft.

He carried his grief forward into a long life of service. He fought in the wars after the Prophet's death, joining the armies under Abu Bakr and then Umar. With Umar he shared a friendship full of small, telling moments. Once Jarir bared his upper body to make ablution, as men commonly did, and Umar poked him and told him to cover up, lest a man of his beauty become a temptation, a reminder that modesty in our faith is not only the concern of one sex. Another time, in a gathering, someone broke wind loudly and to his great embarrassment, and Umar, not knowing who, demanded that whoever did it rise and renew his ablution. No one moved; the shame of standing was too much. After Umar said it a third time, Jarir spoke up: let all of us rise, and make ablution, and pray. So the whole gathering stood together, and one man's dignity was quietly shielded by the many. Umar looked at him and

said, "May Allah have mercy on you. What a fine leader you were in the days of ignorance, and what a fine leader you are in Islam." Even there, in a small embarrassment that touched no sin at all, Jarir's instinct was the same goodwill: how do I spare this brother?

That same goodwill is why the civil strife among the Muslims broke his heart so completely. Jarir, whom the companions counted almost as family, wanted no part in the fighting between factions of believers. When he was urged to take a side, he answered that the Prophet ﷺ had sent him to call people to Islam, not to fight those who had already entered it: "I will not raise my hand against anyone who has said there is no god but Allah." He withdrew, refusing even to remain in a city where another Muslim was being insulted, and he went out to a remote place to keep away from the discord and to worship his Lord in peace. It was, he said, not what he had become a Muslim for. He was holding, in his own way, to the prophetic counsel that when strife grows wild, it can be better for a person to take to the hills with his sheep than to be drawn into it.

He lived many years. His sons became narrators of the hundred and more reports he carried from the Prophet ﷺ, among them the account of the Prophet ﷺ wiping over his footwear after relieving himself, a report the early Muslims prized precisely because Jarir's late entry into Islam meant it could not have been an abrogated practice; it was the religion as the Prophet ﷺ left it. When Jarir died, around the year fifty-one after the Hijrah, he was brought back to the city, and the companions wept long over him, remembering everything the Prophet ﷺ had said about a man who had walked with him for barely a month.

What Jarir's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read Jarir's story as the story of a beautiful man, and to leave it there, admiring him the way the mosque admired him on the day he walked in. But the Prophet ﷺ would not let Jarir rest in that, and we should not either. The first thing his life asks of us is the thing the Prophet ﷺ asked of him: do not let what people can see stand in for what only Allah can see. "Allah has made you beautiful in creation, so make your character beautiful too." Every one of us has been given some gift the world notices, looks, talent, wealth, a quick mind, a good name, and every one of those gifts is an opening, not an accomplishment. The question Jarir's life puts to us is whether we are building an inward self as worthy as the outward one, knowing that Allah weighs the heart while the people are still busy with the surface.

Then there is the single word that organized his whole life: sincere goodwill toward every Muslim. We tend to imagine devotion as something dramatic, reserved for great trials. Jarir shows us that it lives mostly in small, unwitnessed decisions. It is the four hundred extra dirhams pressed on a baffled seller because his goods were worth more. It is the lower price quoted to a buyer who was about to overpay. It is the willingness to stand up in a crowded room so that one embarrassed brother does not have to stand alone. None of these would have earned him praise from anyone; most would never be seen. He did them because he had made a pledge to Allah, and because he genuinely wanted for his brother what he wanted for himself. Ask yourself how much of your dealing with others, in the marketplace, in your messages, in the quiet places where no one is keeping score, is shaped by wanting good for them for the sake of Allah, and how much is shaped by wanting good only for yourself.

And there is his refusal, near the end, to lift his hand against people who had said the words of faith, his withdrawal from strife when it would have cost him nothing to join in. In an age loud with the urge to take sides and to wound, Jarir's restraint is a kind of worship we badly need to recover. He understood that goodwill toward a believer does not switch off when the believer becomes inconvenient, and that there are times when the most faithful thing is to step back, hold your tongue, and protect your own heart from a fire you cannot put out. So take one thing from him into an ordinary day. Pay someone what they are truly owed when you could have paid less. Cover a person's slip instead of exposing it. Withhold the cutting word you were sure you were entitled to say. Do it quietly, for Allah, the way Jarir did, and let your character grow as striking as anything the people can see. May Allah be pleased with Jarir ibn Abdullah, the Yusuf of this ummah, and grant us a share of the goodwill and the humility that made a man beloved to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in only forty days.

This chapter follows the account of Jarir ibn Abdullah (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The transcript cites prophetic narrations rather than specific Qur'anic verses, so no Qur'an is quoted here. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Adi ibn Hatim al-Tai

From a Christian King to a Companion

For twenty years he hated the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ without ever once setting eyes on him. He had never sat in his gathering, never heard him recite, never spoken a word to him. The slander reached him across the desert: that this man in Madinah was tearing families apart, breaking tribes, sowing chaos so that he could climb to power. And so Adi (may Allah be pleased with him) made up his mind from a great distance, and he was certain. He was a Christian king of the Arabs, he had everything he wanted, and in this new faith he saw nothing for himself but loss.

This is the story of how a man that hardened, that sure of his hatred, came at last to sit on the only cushion in the house of the most powerful man in Arabia, and discovered that everything he had believed for two decades was wrong.

The son of the most generous of the Arabs

You cannot understand Adi without first standing in the shadow of his father. His father was Hatim al-Tai, quite literally one of the most famous men in the entire history of the Arabs. He was the chief of the tribe of Tayy, in a region northwest of Madinah, and his name became the very measure of generosity. In Arabic poetry, to say that a man was "more generous than Hatim" was to describe the furthest limit a human being could reach. Hatim was the standard against which generosity itself was judged.

The stories about him survive even outside the books of seerah, in the secular histories of the Arabs. Along a trade route, he would light a fire outside his home every night as a signal to travellers: that at any hour, anyone passing could come and find food and shelter waiting. When famine struck his people, he gave away everything until he had slaughtered every one of his animals, even his own riding camels, so that his people might survive while he went hungry. A traveller once came needing food, and Hatim, owning nothing left but the famous steed he rode into battle, ordered it slaughtered to feed the man. His own daughter once spoke the words that captured their household: the generosity of my father has left us in need. Even in death he would not stop giving, instructing that two great pots be kept filled with food and water at his grave, so that any traveller passing by would find provision.

Hatim died around the year 578, some eight years after the birth of the Prophet ﷺ, before any revelation had come, a man who lived in the long gap between Jesus, peace be upon him, and Muhammad ﷺ, never reached by a message we could judge him against. His fate rests with Allah, and we leave it there, neither cursing him nor passing a verdict, while we are free to praise the goodness that the Prophet ﷺ himself would later praise.

The wealth without the heart

Adi inherited his father's position, his wealth, his prestige, the love his people held for the house of Hatim. But, reading his life gently, in the years before Islam he did not seem to inherit the same generosity, the same open hand. He kept the fortune without the soul that had earned it, and took for himself a full quarter of the spoils of every battle his tribe fought, the largest share recorded of any Arab chief of his time.

Two things bound Adi to the old order. He was loved by the Arabs for his father's sake and loved the world that gave him his place. And he was a devout Christian, following one of the Eastern sects, very different from the Christianity of the Byzantines, one that still carried many of the rituals of Judaism while elevating Jesus, peace be upon him, to divinity. So when news of the Prophet ﷺ reached him, he did not weigh the religion at all. He weighed the politics. He saw a rising power in Madinah that threatened the arrangement he profited from, and declared himself an enemy. There are indications that he financed expeditions against the Muslims, even if he never once stood on a battlefield against the Prophet ﷺ himself. For two decades he was geographically close and spiritually closed. He simply did not want this man to disturb a world that was treating him so well.

The flight, and the sister left behind

Then the arrangement began to crumble. Makkah fell. The towns and tribes that had once fought the Prophet ﷺ began, one after another, to come into Islam. An invitation reached Adi too, an offer to negotiate or to believe. His answer was flat: I have no interest in his faith, and no interest in negotiating with him.

Instead he made a plan to run. He gathered a caravan for himself and his family and instructed his trusted servant to watch the movements around Madinah. If the army of the Prophet ﷺ began to march, the servant was to bring word, and Adi would flee north to Syria, where the Christians were, his people in religion if not in blood. He waited, ready, unwilling to fight and unwilling to submit.

The day came. The servant rushed to him: my master, the scouts of the Prophet ﷺ are in the area. The man leading that force, the name worth remembering, was Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him), arriving almost exactly as Adi was preparing to

bolt. Adi seized his wife, his children, whatever he could carry, and fled to Syria. Only later did he realise the cost of his haste: in the panic he had left his own sister behind. Her name was Safana, and she was captured with the rest of the tribe and brought to Madinah.

And so Adi reached Syria and found it bitter. The Christians there did not treat him as one of their own; their Christianity was not his. He had fled to find brotherhood and found himself a foreigner, far from his land, with no idea what had become of the sister he had abandoned.

The Prophet's ﷺ kindness to a captive

The story now passes to Safana, in the very midst of the captives in Madinah. As the Prophet ﷺ walked by, she called out to him: O Messenger of Allah, my father is dead, my guardian is absent, so be gracious to me, may Allah be gracious to you. He did not know who she was, and she did not say. He walked on. A second time she called the same words, and again he passed without answering, though he had heard her. The third time she rose to her feet and made her presence felt and spoke with more force.

This time he stopped and asked her: who is your father? She answered that her father was Hatim al-Tai, a man who loved noble character, who fed people, who cared for the traveller and the guest. And my guardian, she said, is Adi, who has fled to Syria. The Prophet ﷺ said that her father had indeed been a good man, and that had he died upon Islam, they would have asked Allah's mercy for him. Then he told the companions to let her go.

But watch the care in what he did next. He told her not to leave in a hurry. Wait, he said, for a group of travellers you trust, so that

we can be sure you arrive safely. It was not enough to free her; he would not have a woman set out alone across the desert and meet harm on the way. When trustworthy relatives of hers passed through bound for Syria, she asked permission to go with them, and he gave it. Then one of the companions whispered to her: ask the Prophet ﷺ for a camel. She asked, and he gave her a camel, fine clothing, and a generous sum of money for the journey. When he learned afterward that it was Ali who had whispered to her, he did not mind. Ali knew that whoever asked the Prophet ﷺ would always be given.

The counsel of a sister

Safana arrived in Syria, and Adi came to embrace her. She did not return his embrace. She unloaded on him every curse she could find. You miserable man, she said. You forgot your family chasing your own wealth. You fled like a coward. On and on she went, while he pleaded that it had all happened so fast. And when at last her anger spent itself, she told him plainly what she had seen: that she had been a captive of this man Muhammad ﷺ, an enemy's sister, and he had set her free, and given her a camel, and clothing, and money for the road.

Adi turned the strange fact over. Two decades of enmity, and this man only a few miles away, and they had never met. What do you think of him, he asked her. Her answer became the hinge of his whole life. Go to this man quickly, she said. If he turns out to be a prophet, then you will have followed a prophet. And if he is only a king like other kings, you will lose nothing, for you have already seen that you find from him only good.

The cushion in the house of the most powerful man

So Adi made his way to Madinah, still half an enemy, still a Christian, but curious now. I am a man who can read people, he told himself. If he is a liar, I will see it at once. He arrived, and the murmur ran ahead of him through the streets: Adi has come, Adi has come. The Prophet ﷺ was sitting in the mosque. Adi greeted him, and the Prophet ﷺ stood up, took him by the hand, and told the people he was taking this man to sit with him in his house. This was his practice: when a noble man comes to you, honour him. He would not make a spectacle of a fallen enemy; he simply welcomed him and walked beside him, holding his hand.

Already Adi was unsettled. I used to fight this man, he thought, and look how he treats me. But what happened on that short walk undid him further. A weak old woman, a child with her, stopped the Prophet ﷺ in the road and began to pour out her troubles. And the most powerful man in Arabia stopped everything, even his noble guest, and stood and listened and helped her through her problem. Adi watched and said to himself: by Allah, this is not how a king behaves. I have seen kings. This is not one of them.

They reached the house, and Adi was braced to see a palace. He saw instead a small chamber of mud, and the inside was humbler than the outside, for there was almost nothing in it. There was one cushion. The Prophet ﷺ took that single cushion, set it down, and told Adi to sit on it. Adi was ashamed. No, he said, you sit on it, this is your house; how can I sit on the cushion while you sit on the ground, I who fought you? But the Prophet ﷺ insisted, back and forth, until Adi was seated on the only cushion in the house and the Prophet ﷺ sat on the bare earth. And Adi thought again: there is no way this man is a king. Twenty years of hatred were being dismantled by a single afternoon.

The questioning, and three promises

Adi was wearing a large golden cross. The Prophet ﷺ looked at it, told him to cast off that idol, and recited the verse:

They take their rabbis and their monks as lords, as well as Christ, the son of Mary. But they were commanded to serve only one God: there is no god but Him; He is far above whatever they set up as His partners!

QUR'AN 9:31

But we do not worship them, Adi protested, meaning the rabbis and the priests. The Prophet ﷺ answered with a question: did they not make lawful for you what was forbidden, and forbid you what was lawful, and did you not follow them in it? When men take it upon themselves to turn the permitted into the prohibited and the prohibited into the permitted, and others obey them in it, this is the very worship the verse names. No one may rewrite the revelation of Allah.

Then the Prophet ﷺ named the very sect Adi followed. Adi was stunned that he should know such a thing, and the Prophet ﷺ pressed further: were you not taking a quarter of the spoils of your people, which was not lawful for you even in your own religion? He knew Adi's faith better than Adi knew it himself, and used Adi's own beliefs to show him where his life had drifted. What is stopping you, he asked, from saying that there is no god but Allah, and from saying Allahu akbar? Do you know of any god besides Him, or of anything greater than Him?

Then he read Adi's heart aloud. Perhaps what holds you back, he said, is the poverty you see around me, this humble community, while our enemies seem to have all the power, and you fear it will one day swallow us. And then he made three promises, of a future Adi could not imagine. The day is coming, he said, when a

woman will travel alone from al-Hira, far to the north, all the way to the Kaaba to make tawaf, fearing no one but Allah. And the treasures of Kisra, the emperor of Persia, will be in our hands. Adi thought this had gone too far; Makkah and Madinah he could accept, but the treasures of the most powerful man on earth. The Prophet ﷺ said it again, and a third time. And a day will come, he said, when a man will carry his wealth searching for someone to accept his charity and find no one in need to take it.

Looking at the certainty in him, the way he described the future as though watching it unfold before his eyes, Adi could resist no longer. He bore witness that there is no god but Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.

And here is what Adi, telling this story as a very old man, added at the end. He lived to be a hundred and twenty years, and saw two of the three with his own eyes. He saw the woman travel from al-Hira to the Kaaba fearing none but Allah. He was himself part of the army that entered Persia and held the treasures of Kisra in their hands. And the third, he said, I am still waiting for, though it came soon after his death, in the time of Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, when justice so filled the land that in some regions a man could not find a single person poor enough to accept his zakat.

A new heart, and a long loyalty

Islam entered Adi's heart, and with it the inheritance he had not received before: now he became like his father in generosity, but as a Muslim. He led his people back to their land and led them in their religion, and he became known for his righteousness and, above all, for his prayer. From the day he became Muslim, he said, the call to prayer never once sounded except that he was already longing for it, already waiting and ready. The spiritual

man he had been before Islam had at last found what that hunger was reaching for.

He saw the Prophet ﷺ only a few times, for he embraced Islam near the end of that blessed life. And then the test came. After the Prophet ﷺ died, a false prophet rose near the lands of Tayy and nearly carried away the whole tribe into his army to march on Madinah. Had Adi's faith ever truly been the power grab his enemies once accused him of, here was his moment. Instead he stood firm, becoming one of the most loyal chiefs of Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), holding his people in Islam, his sister Safana now Muslim beside him, and joining the defence of the Peninsula against the apostasy.

His loyalty never wavered. He marched with Khalid ibn al-Walid on the impossible desert crossing from Iraq to Syria, the same Khalid whose battalion had once sent him fleeing. Umar, seeing him after a long absence, said: I remember you. You believed when others disbelieved, you stayed loyal when others betrayed, you went forward when others turned back. And when a servant once turned Adi away from Ali's door, Ali scolded the man and ordered that this man, whom the Prophet ﷺ himself had honoured, should be the first ever to be let in.

He fought every battle at Ali's side for the rest of Ali's life. And when the long civil strife was finally over and Adi was still alive, an old, old man, he withdrew to a quiet corner of Kufa and gave himself to the remembrance of Allah, his surviving children gone before him. The only thing the histories remember of his last years is that this former king was the first into the mosque and the last to leave it. When he grew too frail to stand, he prayed sitting, and he would say: I would hate for any of you to think I imagine myself better than you. I have only grown old, and my

bones have grown weak. He died, may Allah be pleased with him, at a hundred and twenty years of age, some sixty-six years after the Hijra.

What Adi's life asks of our faith

There is a temptation, reading a life like this, to keep it at the distance of a good story: a famous father, a dramatic flight, a king humbled by a cushion. But Adi's life is not a tale to admire from across the desert the way he once judged the Prophet ﷺ from across the desert. It is a question put to our own iman.

The first thing it asks is how much of what you believe, you decided from a distance and never tested. For twenty years Adi was certain, and his certainty rested entirely on what others told him and on what he stood to lose, never once on looking for himself. We do this too. We close the question of who Allah is, of what worship is for, while standing far off, protecting some arrangement that is treating us comfortably. Adi's life asks us to do what he finally did: to come close, to look honestly, to let inherited certainty be tested against the truth. Faith that has never been examined is often only habit, or only fear of loss, wearing the clothes of conviction.

The second thing it asks concerns what we will give up. Adi did not resist Islam because he doubted it. He resisted because he profited from the world as it was: the tribe that loved him, the quarter of the spoils that was never lawfully his. The hardest thing to surrender to Allah is rarely an argument; it is an advantage. Each of us has some quiet quarter we keep for ourselves, some habit or income or standing we sense does not sit right with our faith, and we look away from it the way Adi looked away for twenty years. The Prophet ﷺ did not argue Adi out of his beliefs so much as hold up Adi's own life and let him

see where it had drifted. Hold up your own. Ask where you are taking what is not yours, and give it back to Allah before you are made to.

And the third thing, the one that should lift the heart: see what finally moved him, not a clever argument but the calm certainty of a man describing the future as if it were already before his eyes. Two of those three promises Adi lived to watch come true, and he died waiting in full confidence for the third. This is the nature of Allah's promise. It can look, from where we stand, as impossible as the treasures of Kisra falling into the hands of a community in a bare mud house with a single cushion. And it comes true anyway, in its time, exactly as He said. The quality to carry into an ordinary day is that trust: to believe Allah's word about what is coming, the reward, the relief, the meeting with Him, before any of it is visible, and to let that trust loosen your grip on the small advantages of the present.

So do one concrete thing. Find one quarter you have been keeping that is not truly yours, and surrender it for His sake alone. And when you next stand for prayer, stand the way Adi did, already longing for it before the call has finished, treating it not as a duty owed but as a meeting wanted. May Allah be pleased with Adi ibn Hatim, who came from the furthest enmity to the nearest love, and grant us the honesty to examine our hearts as he examined his, the courage to surrender what we hold back, and a place in the presence of His Prophet ﷺ.

This chapter follows the account of Adi ibn Hatim al-Tai (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (9:31). Where the

histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abbad ibn Bishr

The Friend of the Qur'an

There are companions whose names fill the books, who are quoted on every page, whose children carried their words down the generations. And then there are companions like this one, who appear only a handful of times, almost always beside someone else, never quite standing alone, and yet who leave you wondering what their rank must be with Allah. Abbad ibn Bishr (may Allah be pleased with him) is one of these. He was not survived by sons who would narrate his story. His name slips quietly through the histories. But gather the few moments that remain of him, set them side by side, and a single thread runs through every one of them, bright and unbroken: this was a man in love with the Qur'an.

His teacher, Dr. Omar Suleiman, introduces him with a beautiful title. They called him Imam al-Qari, the leader of the reciters, and khalil al-Qur'an, the friend of the Qur'an. To understand a life like his, you have to slow down, because the meaning of it is not in how much he did, but in how he did it.

A young man of the Ansar

Abbad ibn Bishr was one of the leaders of the Aws, one of the two great tribes of the Ansar in Madinah, alongside the Khazraj. He came from the clan of Banu Abd al-Ashhal, and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ praised that clan in the strongest terms. In one

narration he called them the best of the Ansar. In another, he seemed to give that honour to his own maternal uncles among the Khazraj, and the scholars reconciled the two by saying that each was the best of its branch, and that all of the Ansar were good. When the Prophet ﷺ pointed to these tribes, he was simply saying that the most righteous of his companions would be found among them.

There is a heavy statement narrated about Abbad's clan. It was said that there were three men of Banu Abd al-Ashhal whom no one could equal in virtue. That is the nature of such praise. It is not a single throne with one occupant. Many were lifted high, each in his own way, each holding a particular place with Allah. Abbad was one of those quietly elevated men.

His Islam came early, and it is worth pausing on how early. He accepted the message in Makkah before the Prophet ﷺ ever reached Madinah, carried to him by the teacher whom Allah had sent ahead, Musab ibn Umayr (may Allah be pleased with him). Abbad heard Musab recite the Qur'an and he fell in love, not only with the man, but with the words on his tongue. He memorised everything Musab taught him. By the time the Prophet ﷺ arrived in the city, Abbad had already committed to memory every portion of the Qur'an that had reached the people of Madinah up to that point. Whatever revelation came to that city, this young man gathered it and held it close. That single fact tells you almost everything about him. He was the kind of person who did not let a verse pass him by.

He had a sister, Umm Bishr, also among the early Muslims, married to Mujadhdhir, who was the brother of Muhammad ibn Maslamah (may Allah be pleased with them). So Abbad stood

within a web of believing households, families woven together by faith, the way the Ansar so often were.

A house in which the Qur'an never slept

The Prophet ﷺ paired Abbad with Abu Talhah al-Ansari (may Allah be pleased with him), and their home became known for something remarkable. It was a house in which the night was divided into turns of recitation. The two of them would take shifts through the dark hours, one reading while the world slept, then the other, the Qur'an passing back and forth between them until dawn. Abu Talhah loved the Qur'an as Abbad loved it, and so their house was never silent of it. You can almost hear it, a low and steady voice in the night, never stopping for long, like a lamp that is never allowed to go out.

The single hadith that Abbad narrates from the Prophet ﷺ is fitting for a man so close to the heart of the message. The Prophet ﷺ said to the Ansar that they were like the inner lining of a garment, while everyone else was like its outer part. The inner lining is the cloth that rests against the body, the closest thing to a person. He was telling them: you are the nearest people in the world to me. That a man so devoted to the Qur'an should carry forward exactly this saying, about closeness, about being held against the heart, feels like no accident at all.

His very name suited him. Abbad comes from a root that means intense, constant worship. And that is the shape of his whole life. Every incident the histories preserve of him, every single one, turns on his devotion to Allah and the depth of his worship. He was not a man of one famous deed. He was a man whose ordinary nights were extraordinary, whose private hours with his Lord were so full that they overflowed into miracle.

The voice the Prophet stopped to hear

The first of these incidents comes through Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her). The Prophet ﷺ was praying at night, and through the quiet he heard a voice reciting the Qur'an from the mosque. He turned, listening, admiring what he heard, and asked, "Aisha, do you know whose voice that is?" She did not. He said, "That is the voice of Abbad ibn Bishr." And then he made a quiet prayer for him: "O Allah, have mercy on Abbad. O Allah, forgive Abbad."

Sit with that for a moment. A man is alone in the mosque in the dark, reciting, not for any audience, not knowing anyone is listening, lost in the words. And his recitation is so beautiful, so sincere, that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ stops his own prayer to listen, and asks Allah's mercy and forgiveness upon him by name. There is no higher endorsement a believer could hope for. And Abbad, in all likelihood, did not even know it had happened. His worship was for Allah, and it earned him the prayer of the Prophet ﷺ without his ever asking for it.

The second incident is stranger and more luminous. Two companions once sat with the Prophet ﷺ late into the night, and when they rose to leave on an intensely dark night, it was as though each of them carried a light. Two lamps seemed to go before them, lighting the ground at their feet. When the two men parted ways, the light split, and one went with each of them, walking him all the way home. This recalls what the Prophet ﷺ said about those who walk through the darkness to the mosques: that they will be given a complete light on the Day of Judgment. These two men, it was said, were Abbad ibn Bishr and Usayd ibn Hudayr (may Allah be pleased with them). And it is narrated that the light on Abbad's staff, the stick he leaned on as he walked, never quite left him. They began to speak of him as the man

whose staff was lit. Whatever light Allah had granted him for his nearness, it lingered.

Three arrows, and a man who would not leave his prayer

This is the story that everyone who knows Abbad remembers, and it is, by his teacher's own account, among the most beautiful stories of any of the companions.

The Prophet ﷺ led an expedition known as Dhat al-Riqa, a hard journey, full of danger, the same journey on which a man had crept up and seized the Prophet's own sword as he rested beneath a tree, only to be disarmed by nothing more than the Prophet's calm certainty in Allah. On the way back, late at night, the Muslims made camp, and the Prophet ﷺ asked, "Who will keep watch over us tonight?" Abbad ibn Bishr and Ammar ibn Yasir (may Allah be pleased with them) stood and volunteered. The Prophet ﷺ sent them to the mouth of the valley to guard against any attacker through the night.

There at the valley's edge, Abbad said to Ammar, "Which half of the night would you like to sleep, and which shall I take?" Ammar chose to sleep first, and lay down beside his companion. So now picture it. The army of the Prophet ﷺ is asleep, far off. Ammar is asleep on the ground. And Abbad is awake and alone in the dark valley, charged with watching for death.

And he did what he always did. The calm of the night drew him in, and he began to pray. He recited al-Fatihah, and then he went on into a long surah of the Qur'an, savouring it, lost in it, the way he was lost in it the night the Prophet ﷺ stopped to listen. While he stood reciting, an enemy in the dark loosed an arrow, and it struck him. He pulled it out, set it down beside him, and kept reciting. A second arrow found him. He pulled that one out too,

set it down, and did not stop. The blood was running down his body now and he was growing weaker, but the words kept coming. Then, as he rose from his bowing, a third arrow struck him in the back. He drew it out, laid it with the others, completed his bowing and his prostration, and only then, reaching down from his prostration, did he stretch out his hand and shake Ammar awake.

Ammar sprang up, saw his companion soaked in blood with three arrows on the ground, saw the attacker fleeing back toward the enemy, and the man got away. When Ammar turned back to Abbad, struggling now to tend his own wounds, he cried out, "Glory be to Allah! Why did you not wake me at the first arrow?"

And here is the answer that has echoed for fourteen centuries. Abbad said he had been reciting a passage of the Qur'an that had filled him completely with awe, and he had not wanted to cut it short. Then he swore by Allah: had he not feared abandoning the post the Prophet ﷺ had ordered him to hold, he would have let the man go on shooting until he killed him, rather than break off his recitation. The only thing that made him interrupt the words at all was his duty to the Prophet ﷺ. Left to his own heart, he would have let the arrows take his life before he would willingly stop reciting the words of his Lord. The pain of three arrows could not reach a man whose heart was that far inside the Qur'an.

Trusted with the most delicate work

The Prophet ﷺ saw more in Abbad than a reciter. He saw courage, and he saw integrity, and he used this one man in role after role that demanded both.

Abbad fought at Badr. He took part in the operation against Kab ibn al-Ashraf, one of the fiercest enemies of the Prophet ﷺ, going out with the group led by his own relative Muhammad ibn Maslamah. He was present at Uhud and at the battles that followed, standing in the ranks alongside the Prophet ﷺ in every campaign.

But beyond the battlefield, the Prophet ﷺ trusted him with work that reveals a man's character even more than fighting does. He sent Abbad out as a collector of zakat, the charity of the people, and Abbad carried out the task exactly as he was told, staying ten days and returning faithfully. Handling other people's wealth is a test that has broken many. Abbad passed it. After the conquest of Makkah, the Prophet ﷺ appointed him to distribute the spoils of the battle of Hunayn, a duty that requires deep trust, because a dishonest hand could so easily take what was not his. And in the long, exhausting expedition to Tabuk, the Prophet ﷺ made Abbad his personal guard, his haris, for twenty days, the man who watched the Prophet's back and the backs of the Muslims through one of the most difficult journeys they ever undertook.

Recitation by night, courage by day, and a trust so complete that he was given charge of wealth, of spoils, and of the safety of the Prophet ﷺ himself. This is the rare combination that lived in one quiet man. His devotion to the Qur'an did not make him withdraw from the world. It made him more dependable in it.

A dream of the opening sky

After the Prophet ﷺ passed away, Abbad did not change. He remained an imam, a reciter, a man faithful to Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) in the trials that followed. And so we

come to the battle of Yamamah, against the great apostasy, where this life reached its end.

Many of the companions who would die at Yamamah saw their martyrdom in dreams before it came. The night before the battle, Abbad came to Abu Said al-Khudri (may Allah be pleased with him) and said, "I saw something last night." He described how, in the dream, the heavens had opened above him, a gate swinging wide in the sky, and he had been drawn up through it, and then the sky had closed behind him, like a door shutting. He understood at once what it meant. "I think," he said, "this means I will be martyred." Imagine what the verses of martyrdom and the meeting with Allah must have meant to a man who weighed every word of the Qur'an, who pushed himself the way Abbad did. He spoke of his own death not with fear but with longing. Abu Said answered him, "It is good, what you have seen. May Allah bless you and grant you what you have envisioned."

So the next day, Abu Said watched him, wanting to see what a man with such certainty would look like in battle. And he saw Abbad ibn Bishr take his horse between the ranks, calling out to his people: "O Ansar, break the sheaths of your swords, and set yourselves apart from the others." Make yourselves known. Push forward. And between his calls to rally them, he was reciting the Qur'an, even there, even then. Wherever the line was thin, wherever the enemy broke through, Abbad was at the front of it, crying out for reinforcements. Four hundred men of the Ansar gathered behind him, and they cut their way through. He pressed forward with Abu Dujanah and another companion until they reached the wall of the garden, the innermost stronghold of the enemy. The fighting there was the most severe of all, and Abbad was killed.

When they found him afterward, his face had been struck so badly, his body so disfigured, that Abu Said could only recognise him by a mark on his skin. He was forty-five years old. And the contrast in that one narration is almost unbearable: the dream of a man rising through an opening in the heavens, the sky closing gently behind him, and then this world's image of the same man, broken on the ground, known only by a small mark. The bodies are torn. The souls ascend. What the eye saw was ruin. What had truly happened was that a gate had opened in the sky for him.

He left no sons to carry his name, and according to some reports only a daughter, so his line ended and his story was never told by his own descendants. All that survives directly from him is that one hadith, about the Ansar being the lining held closest to the heart.

But there is one last thread, and it is the kind of detail that makes you stop. Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr (may Allah be pleased with them) loved Abbad ibn Bishr so deeply that he named his own son Abbad after him. And years later, when Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr was himself killed, he too was struck down praying beside the Kaaba, refusing to abandon his prayer even as they came at him from every side, exactly as the man he had so admired had once refused to abandon his prayer beneath the falling arrows. Allah honoured the man who had loved Abbad by letting him leave the world in the very same way: standing before his Lord, unwilling to step out of the prayer, dying as a martyr inside his worship.

What Abbad's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel a distant kind of awe, to picture the arrows and the lamps and the dream of the opening sky, and then to set Abbad on a shelf where he asks nothing of

us. That would be a quiet loss. His life is not a wonder to admire from far away. It is a question put directly to your own heart.

Abbad's whole self was poured into the Qur'an, and not for show. Remember that the most beautiful moments of his life happened when no one was watching. He recited alone in the dark mosque, and the Prophet ﷺ happened to overhear it. He stood praying in an empty valley with one sleeping man beside him, and let three arrows pass through his body rather than cut short his words. There was no audience. There was nothing to gain from people. This is the heart of ikhlas, sincerity: to give your best worship to Allah precisely when no human eye can see it, and to be content that He sees, and that this is enough. Ask yourself honestly how your recitation, your prayer, your dhikr would look if you knew for certain no one would ever know about it. Abbad's would have looked exactly the same. That is the standard, and it is the quality most worth taking from him.

His love for the Qur'an is the door he leaves open for every one of us, and it is a door no circumstance can lock. You may have no wealth to give and no battle to fight, but the same words Abbad held against his heart are available to you tonight. He did not love the Qur'an as a duty he completed and set down. He loved it the way a person loves someone dear, returning to it again and again, dividing his nights around it, finding in it an awe so heavy that pain could not reach him through it. Most of us recite quickly and move on, our minds elsewhere. His life asks whether we have ever once stood in prayer and actually tasted what we were reciting. That experience is not reserved for the companions. It is offered to anyone who will give the Qur'an the time and the stillness it deserves.

And notice that his devotion never made him useless to anyone. The same man who recited through the night was the one the Prophet ﷺ trusted with the people's charity, with the spoils of war, with his own safety on the road. Real love of the Qur'an does not pull a believer out of the world into a private corner. It makes him more honest, more reliable, more courageous, more present for others, because the words he carries are shaping the man he is. If your worship is genuine, the people around you should feel its effects in your trustworthiness and your steadiness, not only in your prayers.

So take one concrete thing from Abbad into your ordinary life. Choose a portion of the Qur'an and return to it tonight, alone, with no one to impress, and recite it slowly enough to mean it, slowly enough to be moved. Do one act of worship this week that no other person will ever discover, and let it be only between you and Allah. And when hardship comes at you like arrows in the dark, let it not be the first thing to pull you away from your Lord. That is how the friend of the Qur'an lived, in sincerity, in nearness, in a love for the words of Allah that outlasted even the pain of his own death. May Allah be pleased with Abbad ibn Bishr, place that same love of His Book in our hearts, and let us meet our Lord as he met Him, standing in worship and longing for nothing but Him.

This chapter follows the account of Abbad ibn Bishr (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'anic passages Abbad recited and the dream and hadith mentioned are described in prose as the lecture relates them; no

specific verse is quoted directly. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Thabit ibn Qays

The Spokesman of the Messenger

If you gathered a room of Muslims and asked them to name the companions whom the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ promised Paradise, the names would come quickly. The ten promised Paradise. The great mothers of the believers. The martyrs whose deaths are recited like poetry. You could go a long while before anyone said the name of the man in this chapter, and that is precisely the point. His guarantee of Jannah did not arrive the way the others did. It came to him in the middle of his tears, after he had convinced himself that he was finished, that a verse had been sent down for his ruin. Everything about his path to Paradise was unconventional, and that is what makes it worth slowing down to read.

His name was Thabit ibn Qays (may Allah be pleased with him), and the title the historians gave him says almost everything: the spokesman of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. The poet of the Prophet ﷺ was Hassan ibn Thabit. The voice of the Prophet ﷺ, the one who would stand and answer for him before kings and delegations, was Thabit ibn Qays.

A loud voice and a noble tongue

He came from the Ansar of Madinah, from the tribe of Khazraj, and he was an early believer. He appears in the seerah near the beginning, in the days when the Ansar were meeting the Prophet

ﷺ and binding themselves to him. Before he was ever the spokesman of the Messenger ﷺ, he was the spokesman of the Ansar, and the reasons were plain. He was extraordinarily eloquent, deeply versed in the Arabic tongue, and he came from a noble house. And he had something else, a voice that boomed. When Thabit spoke, it was as though he had a microphone in his throat. So whenever the Ansar walked into any arena that called for a spokesman, it was Thabit who stood.

Two details of his life deserve to be said plainly, because the histories say them plainly. He was the maternal brother of the great martyr of Uhud, sharing the same mother. And he was, by every account, not a handsome man. This is not mentioned to shame him. It is mentioned because it would surface again and again in his life, and because it teaches something the whole religion rests on: that Allah does not look at your faces or your bodies, but at your hearts and your deeds. Thabit had an unremarkable face and a remarkable tongue, and Allah raised him by the second and was unconcerned with the first.

When the Prophet ﷺ arrived in Madinah, it was Thabit who spoke for the Ansar. He stood and said, on their behalf, that they would protect the Messenger ﷺ the way they protected themselves and their own children, and then he asked what they would receive in return. The answer was a single word that they accepted without bargaining: Paradise. We will take it, they said. We want nothing else from you, Messenger of Allah.

A man terrified of hypocrisy

When the Prophet ﷺ paired the emigrants with the helpers, he matched people of like temperament. Thabit's household received the one whom the Prophet ﷺ called the keeper of his secret, the companion known for being the furthest of all people

from hypocrisy. It is a telling pairing, because the quality that defined Thabit, more than his voice, more than his lineage, was his terror of being a hypocrite.

He feared nifaq to a degree that is hard to imagine. He held himself to so severe a standard that the Prophet ﷺ would have to reassure him, more than once, that he was not among the hypocrites at all, but among those Allah loved. This is the signature of a sincere heart. The hypocrite never suspects himself. The sincere man suspects himself constantly. Thabit lay awake over the state of his own soul while men of far less worth slept soundly in their certainty.

He served as the spokesman, but he was also a soldier. He missed only the Battle of Badr, and only because Badr came suddenly and he was not present for it. After that he stood beside the Prophet ﷺ at Uhud, at the trench, at the pledge of Ridwan, in every campaign. And the Prophet ﷺ would praise him openly. "What an excellent man Thabit is," he would say. When the Prophet ﷺ singled a person out for praise, it was never empty, for he never praised out of flattery. Sometimes it was to establish that person's standing among the companions, so that everyone would take note. And sometimes, in Thabit's case especially, it was to lift the spirits of a man who needed lifting.

There is a tenderness in how the Prophet ﷺ treated him. If Thabit was missing from a gathering, the Prophet ﷺ would immediately ask after him. On one such occasion he was told that Thabit was ill. The Prophet ﷺ went to him, placed his hand on him, and made a supplication for his healing, and that prayer is one of the ways the ummah learned to pray over the sick: that Allah, Lord of mankind, would remove the harm and heal, for He is the Healer, and there is no healing but His, a healing that

leaves no sickness behind. Think of what it means that one of our prayers for the sick reached us through the body of this anxious, devoted man.

The first divorce of its kind

Thabit's life is woven with firsts, and not the kind anyone would choose. His marriage produced the first recorded instance in Islam of a divorce initiated by the woman, what the scholars came to call khul'. It is preserved in Bukhari and Muslim. His wife came to the Prophet ﷺ and was careful, almost pained, in how she spoke. She did not accuse him of anything. "I find no fault with him in his religion or his character," she said. She had no complaint about his faith or his conduct. But she could not endure the marriage, and what she feared, she said, was that her own ingratitude might lead her into disobedience to Allah on his account. In one narration she admitted that she could not bear to be near him, and that were it not for her fear of Allah, she would have spat at the sight of him.

These are hard words, and the histories do not hide them. They appear to come from the very start of the marriage. The Prophet ﷺ asked her whether she would return the garden Thabit had given her as her dowry. She said yes. He instructed that the garden be returned, and the marriage was dissolved. This is why it stands as the first khul' in Islam.

It is worth pausing here, because there are several lessons folded into this one episode. The first is simply that it is real, and we do not skip past the hard parts of a companion's life to keep the picture tidy. The second is that this could not have been easy for Thabit. To be told such things, and then to lose his marriage, must have wounded a man already so hard on himself. And yet whoever fears Allah, Allah makes for him a way out. The third

lesson is one of caution: this hadith is among the most misused in matters of marriage, and no one should pull a ruling from it without the guidance of a scholar. The point for us is not the law. The point is the man, and how Allah carried him through a private grief.

And Allah did carry him. After that hard beginning, Thabit married Jamilah, a righteous woman of high standing, the widow of a martyr. Through her, Allah gave him sons, the first named Muhammad. They had a household full of children, and the man who had once been told the cruelest thing was given, in the end, a noble wife and a blessed home.

When the words flowed

Thabit was not a poet in the manner of Hassan ibn Thabit, who could cut down an enemy with verse. He did not deal in insult. What he did, with a power few could match, was praise. When he praised Allah and praised the Messenger ﷺ, the words came out of him like poetry even though they were not poetry. Even an ordinary address from Thabit sounded like song when it turned to the praise of his Lord.

So when the Prophet ﷺ walked somewhere and wanted his voice with him, he would ask, "Where is my spokesman?" And in the year of delegations, when the tribes of Arabia came pouring in to enter Islam, Thabit had his greatest hour. The Arabs of that age knew only how to praise themselves, their own tribes, their own ancestors. When the delegation of Banu Tamim came and stood to boast of their lineage, the Prophet ﷺ told Thabit to rise and answer them, and Thabit did not answer pride with pride. He answered with the praise of God.

He stood and said that all praise belongs to Allah, whose creation is the heavens and the earth, who decreed His command over them, whose knowledge encompasses all things, and from whose grace alone anything we possess has come. He praised the Prophet ﷺ as the most noble of people in lineage, the most truthful in speech, the most beautiful in character, the one upon whom Allah sent down His Book and entrusted with His creation. He spoke of the emigrants who had believed, and of the helpers who answered the call of Allah when His Messenger ﷺ called, and he said: we are the Ansar of the Prophet of Allah ﷺ and the ministers of His Messenger. And through all of it the Prophet ﷺ sat with a wide smile on his face, because to a people who had come knowing only how to glorify their idols, here was a man teaching them how to glorify God.

The verse that broke him, and the promise that healed him

This same booming voice, his gift, became the source of his deepest fear. A verse was revealed:

believers, do not raise your voices above the Prophet's, do not raise your voice when speaking to him as you do to one another, or your [good] deeds may be cancelled out without you knowing.

QUR'AN 49:2

Imagine hearing that, when you are the man with the loudest voice in Madinah, the man whose voice naturally rose above the soft, shy voice of the Prophet ﷺ. Thabit heard it and crumbled. He went home and shut himself away and wept. When the Prophet ﷺ noticed his absence and sent to ask after him, the answer came back that Thabit was at home in tears, saying he was finished, that the verse had been revealed about him, that he

was surely of the people of the Fire and his deeds were all nullified.

The Prophet ﷺ sent a message back to him. Tell him, he said, that he is not of the people of the Fire. Rather, he is of the people of Paradise. So the guarantee of Jannah reached Thabit not as a reward for a battle won, but as a balm for a man drowning in fear of his Lord, a man so frightened of falling short that the Prophet ﷺ had to reach across the city and tell him he was already saved.

It happened more than once. On another occasion, when a verse came about Allah not loving those who are arrogant and boastful, Thabit again decided he was destroyed, for he was a man who stood and spoke with the pride of the Ansar. Again the Prophet ﷺ missed him, and this time went to him in person and asked what was wrong. Thabit poured out his heart, and notice how a sincere man speaks of himself. He did not say he was free of fault. He said, I find in myself that I love to be praised, and Allah forbids boastfulness. I love beautiful things, and I dress a certain way. And my voice is loud, and Allah has forbidden us to raise our voices over yours. I see no way out for myself. He searched his own soul and reported its faults like a man confessing.

The Prophet ﷺ laughed, and then gave him something more specific than the first glad tiding. He answered Thabit's exact fears one by one. Are you not pleased, he asked, that you will live a praiseworthy life, and be killed as a martyr, and enter Paradise? Three promises, fitted precisely to the three fears. And Thabit held onto those words for the rest of his life.

Two white shrouds at Yamamah

Years passed. The Prophet ﷺ was gone, and after him Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) took up the leadership, and Thabit became his spokesman too. There is a beauty in this: he had been the voice of the Ansar, then the voice of the Messenger ﷺ, then the voice of the successor, the spokesman of the Muslims in all their affairs.

When the false prophet Musaylimah rose in Yamamah and the armies marched out to meet him, Thabit went out among them, placed in command of the Ansar. And the man who narrated his last moments said that as they prepared for battle, he found Thabit missing, and went to look for him, and found him applying perfume to his body, the hanut, the scent put on the dead. He was anointing himself for his own death. Then he wrapped himself in two white garments like a burial shroud, and that was his battle dress, as if he were stepping into the very promise the Prophet ﷺ had given him.

As they advanced, he was told that some of the Muslims had fled the field. "Move away from in front of me," he said, "so I can fight these people. I do not want to see those who run." He took the front line. He looked at the wavering soldiers and rebuked them: this is not how we fought when the Prophet ﷺ was among us. Fight with more sincerity, more resolve. And then he made his supplication aloud, dissociating himself from everything the enemy worshipped and everything they did, asking Allah to clear his path so he could meet the heat of the battle himself. He pressed forward, scattering the enemy left and right, a horseman in two white shrouds with the scent of the grave already upon him, until he was struck down and fell from his horse, a martyr at Yamamah, exactly as he had been promised.

But his story does not end at his death. After he was martyred, Thabit appeared to one of the Muslims in a dream. He explained that his valuable armor had been taken from the field by one of the men, who had carried it off as spoils and hidden it under a cooking pot in a certain house. He gave the exact location. And he said he had a debt to pay, and asked that the armor be retrieved, sold, and the money used to settle what he owed. He even named the debt and the man. The dreamer carried this to the commander, Khalid ibn al-Walid (may Allah be pleased with him), and Khalid, finding the armor missing as described, said he could only see this as a message from Allah through Thabit. They went to the house, looked under the pot, and found the armor exactly where the dream had said. It was sold, and the debt was paid.

The scholars marked this as the only known case of a will fulfilled through a dream, a dead man's bequest carried out because the commander acted on it and found it true. And after Thabit, all his children were martyred too, on the day of al-Harrah, so that his line gave itself to Allah down to the last of them. May Allah be pleased with them all, and with their father, and with all the companions of the Prophet ﷺ.

What Thabit's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and notice only the drama, the booming voice, the white shrouds, the dream that found the buried armor. But the heart of Thabit's story is quieter than any of that, and it is aimed straight at us.

He was a man terrified of his own hypocrisy. Twice he convinced himself that a verse had come down for his destruction, and twice he sat weeping over the state of his soul while the Prophet ﷺ had to come and tell him he was bound for Paradise. We tend

to think of strong faith as confidence, a serene certainty that we are fine. Thabit teaches the opposite. The sound heart is the one that examines itself, that worries it is falling short, that takes the warnings of Allah personally. The hypocrite is at ease about himself. The believer holds himself to account before he is held to account. Ask yourself honestly which of the two you resemble when a reminder of Allah reaches you. Do you assume it is about someone else, or do you let it search you the way Thabit let it search him?

And see what that fear was wrapped around. It was not anxiety for its own sake. It was love. He was frightened because he could not bear the thought of displeasing the One he loved. He confessed his faults plainly, that he loved praise, that he loved fine things, that his voice was loud, not to excuse them but because he wanted them gone. This is the fear and hope and love of Allah held together in one heart, and it is the very thing faith is made of. A man can have a flaw he cannot fully shake, a love of being noticed, a fondness for nice clothes, and still be promised Paradise, so long as he hates that flaw in himself and turns it over to his Lord. That should give every honest soul hope, because none of us is free of such things.

Then there is his sincerity, his ikhlas. When he marched at Yamamah, he was not performing for the army. He perfumed himself for death in private. He took the front line so that no one would stand between him and the enemy. He gave himself to Allah completely, and asked for nothing back but the meeting he had been promised. That is the question his life puts to ours: how much of what we do is done so that people will see, and how much could we do the way he anointed himself, alone, for Allah?

So take something of Thabit into an ordinary day. The next time a verse or a reminder unsettles you, do not brush it off as meant for somebody worse than you. Let it land. Examine your own heart the way he examined his, name the fault you have been avoiding, and turn it to Allah with hope, not despair, for the same Lord who reassured Thabit is the One you are turning to. And do one good thing today that no eye will catch, the way he perfumed himself in private, purely because Allah is enough of a witness. That is a faith available to anyone, the loud and the quiet, the handsome and the plain, and it is the faith that earned an anxious man the promise of Paradise. May Allah be pleased with Thabit ibn Qays, grant us his fear of falling short and his hope in his Lord, and gather us with him and the Messenger ﷺ he served with his every word.

This chapter follows the account of Thabit ibn Qays (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (49:2). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Zayd ibn al-Khattab

The Silent Giant

There is a kind of greatness that announces itself, that fills a room before its owner has finished entering it. And there is another kind, quieter and harder to see, that says almost nothing at all, that puts its head down and worships, and is only fully understood after it is gone. The man in this chapter was the second kind. He was the older brother of one of the loudest, largest personalities in the history of Islam, and he spent his life standing one step behind that brother's shadow, saying little, asking for nothing, until the day he ran forward into an army ten times his size and did not come back.

His name was Zayd ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), and to understand him you first have to understand who he was standing next to.

The brother no one expected

If you gathered a hundred Muslims and asked them to name a favorite companion, a great many would say Umar ibn al-Khattab. His personality was larger than life. His voice was so powerful that the narrations describe a man fainting from the sheer boom of it. As soon as his name is mentioned in any story, people begin to smile, because they know it is about to become interesting. He is unforgettable.

Now imagine being his older brother.

Imagine sharing a face, a height, the same household and the same hard father, and being the opposite of him in temperament. This is one of the gentle mercies in how Allah made us: that two people can come from the same womb, look alike, carry the same blood, and yet be given entirely different souls, different gifts, and different paths back to their Lord. People assume that resemblance means sameness. It rarely does. Umar was a torrent. His brother was a still, deep well.

Zayd was one year older than Umar. The histories almost lose him completely. He is, in a sense, the most overlooked man in a family crowded with famous names, and the scholars gave him a fitting title for it: the silent giant. He barely opens his mouth in the entire record. He is, as one description puts it, a victim of his own silence, a man so quiet that the historians glossed over him even though his brother became the second leader of all the Muslims.

And yet listen to how that brother spoke of him, because almost everything we know of Zayd comes to us through the mouth of Umar. You do not often hear a man praise his sibling the way Umar praised Zayd. He did not merely love him. He envied his silent righteousness, and he said so openly, again and again, for the rest of his life.

A man you only heard in battle

Physically, Zayd was striking. He looked very much like Umar, with the same imposing frame, except that his complexion was darker. He was awkwardly, almost impossibly tall. In every account of him his height is the detail that survives: when a group approached from a distance, he was the one person you could pick out before anyone else, the figure rising above the rest while they were still far off. A presence like that usually comes with a

personality to match. His did not. He was enormous and he was quiet.

The strange and beautiful thing about Zayd is that you almost never hear his voice except in one place: the battlefield. Outside of war he is nearly silent in the record. He has the profile of a man who simply wants to be thrown into the fight, to do his duty, and to say nothing about it afterward.

This is worth pausing on, because we tend to over-celebrate one kind of believer: the leader, the speaker, the one on the front lines making his presence known. Most people are not that, and they should not feel that the door to nearness with Allah is therefore closed to them. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ described a particular kind of beloved servant: the one who enters a gathering and leaves it again without anyone noticing he was there. Not because he is unimportant, but because he keeps his head down and worships. He does not open his mouth to backbite. He does not get onto anyone's bad side. He stays pure of the sins of the gathering and goes home to his Lord. That is a profile of a person of Paradise, and Umar, who carried the weight of his own loud tongue, used to wish aloud that he could be exactly that: a quiet believer who comes and goes unnoticed. Zayd already was.

His virtues are stated simply and they are staggering. He accepted Islam a full year before Umar. He made the migration to Madinah before Umar. And he was granted martyrdom before Umar. The younger brother, for all his fame, was beaten to every good thing by the quiet one.

Born into a hard house

Zayd and Umar were the sons of al-Khattab, and al-Khattab was not a kind father. He was known for cruelty. Umar himself, who became one of the most tender fathers imaginable to his own children, would later say that he had set out deliberately not to become like his own father, because what he remembered of him was abuse and beating and mistreatment. There is a quiet lesson in that, in a man taking the pain he was handed and refusing to pass it down.

But it means something for Zayd, too. He was the firstborn of that hard house. Whatever Umar absorbed, Zayd, as the elder, absorbed first and likely longest. He grew up under that same harshness and emerged from it not bitter and loud, but soft and silent. Out of a difficult beginning, Allah brought out a man of legendary piety.

When Zayd reached Madinah, the Prophet ﷺ used to pair the emigrants with the helpers of the city in a kind of brotherhood, and there was a wisdom in how he matched them: he often joined people of similar temperament. He paired Zayd with a man of the Ansar who was very much like him, another quiet warrior, a man who obeyed the Prophet ﷺ in all things and said little. The single narration we have from that companion is one of the most moving lines of that era. At the time of the Prophet's death ﷺ, when the believers were drowning in grief and many were saying they wished they had died before him so as not to face the trials that would surely follow, this man said something different. He said that he did not wish he had died first. He wanted to live so that he could believe in the Prophet ﷺ after his death the same way he had believed in him while he was alive. He wanted the reward of that steadfast faith, tested and proven, once the Messenger ﷺ was gone. Remember that man. His path and Zayd's would cross one final time.

Always at the Prophet's side

Here is the shape of Zayd's life in war: wherever you saw the Prophet ﷺ, you saw Zayd. He was a gifted horseman and one of the very few who never once fled from the Prophet's side, not even on the day of Uhud, when the lines broke and panic spread and only a small band held firm around the Messenger ﷺ. Zayd was among that blessed band. He was present at Badr. He was beside the Prophet ﷺ at Uhud. He dug the trench at the battle of the Confederates. He was among those who gave their pledge under the tree, the pledge after which Allah declared in His Book that He was pleased with the believers who gave it. Through all of this, Zayd is almost invisible. He makes his presence known not through speeches but through being there, always there, never leaving.

There is one scene from Badr that captures both brothers at once. Umar tells it himself. He saw Zayd fighting in the thick of the battle without any armor, exposed, with no coat of mail to protect him. So Umar went to his brother, took off his own armor, and told him to wear it. And Zayd refused. He said to Umar, in effect: I seek martyrdom in exactly the same way that you seek it. You know what you are saying, and I know what I am saying. Keep it. So Umar left his own armor as well, and the two brothers fought side by side at Badr with no armor and no shields between them and the enemy.

It is worth noticing what their hunger for martyrdom did not do. It did not make them careless or slack in the fighting. They did not throw their lives away or stand still hoping to be struck down quickly. They fought ferociously and they won. Their longing for what was with Allah sharpened their courage rather than dulling their effort. That is the difference between despair and faith.

The only narration we have of Zayd outside of battle comes from the farewell pilgrimage, where he reported a teaching of the Prophet ﷺ about those whom Allah has placed under your authority: feed them from what you eat, clothe them from what you wear, treat them with the gentleness due to a trust from God. Even his single recorded word away from the sword was about mercy.

The day at Yamamah

After the Prophet ﷺ passed away, a great trial swept the peninsula. Tribes broke away, and false prophets rose, the worst of them a liar named Musaylimah who gathered an enormous army. Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) sent the believers out to confront this apostasy, and the battle that followed, at a place called Yamamah, was one of the bloodiest days the early Muslims ever knew. More companions were killed there than in any other single event. Over six hundred of the Sahabah fell in that one battle.

Zayd was the flag bearer. He carried the banner of the Muslims that day, which alone tells you the rank he held among them, the trust placed in him.

There is a haunting story attached to the man Zayd killed to open the battle. Umar's son once recounted a day in Madinah when the companions were sitting around the Prophet ﷺ, and among them was a man who recited the Qur'an beautifully and worshipped deeply and seemed as close to the Messenger ﷺ as any of them. The Prophet ﷺ looked at the group and said that one of those sitting there would have a molar tooth in the Fire larger than a mountain. He said no more. And every companion present went home afraid that he might be the one, never feeling safe from the test that Allah could send. One by one over the

years those companions passed away in faith, until only two were left: the narrator, and that beautiful reciter. And then the Prophet ﷺ died, and the reciter abandoned Islam and joined Musaylimah. His defection was a deeper wound to the believers than Musaylimah himself, because everyone already knew Musaylimah was a liar, but to watch a man who carried the Qur'an in his chest walk away from it shook them to the core.

When the believers marched out to Yamamah, Zayd was looking for that man. His sense of honor for the religion would not let it rest. And it happened that this defector fell to Zayd in single combat at the very start of the fighting, a blow that demoralized the enemy and cracked their resolve before the main battle had even caught fire.

Then the slaughter began, and the Muslims were badly outnumbered and outmatched in weapons and position. And Zayd never stopped moving forward. He pressed on until he was in the very center of the enemy host, raising the banner and calling out into the chaos: Where are the men? Where are the men? He was driving the believers forward, refusing to let anyone fall back. You can almost hear the family resemblance in it, the spirit of his brother breaking through the silence at last, frustrated at every hesitation. He cried out a prayer: O Allah, I ask Your forgiveness for what these companions have done by retreating, and I declare myself innocent of what Musaylimah and his followers have brought. And he kept going forward, deeper, until he was struck down, and the banner fell from his hand.

And when they gathered the dead, Zayd was found lying beside a man of the Ansar: the same quiet brother he had been paired with in Madinah, the one who had said he wanted to live so he could prove his faith after the Prophet's death ﷺ. The two of

them lay there together, two silent men who had asked for so little and given everything.

The grief that would not leave

The story does not end with Zayd's death. In some ways it begins there, because the most profound thing about Zayd is the grief his brother carried for him.

When the survivors returned and the news reached Madinah that the battle was won but hundreds had fallen, the families came out to wait and to see who had made it home. Umar was among them, pacing nervously, looking for the one figure he would be able to recognize before anyone else, the tall brother who always rose above the crowd. He did not see him. And before a word was spoken, Umar broke and began to weep, because he already knew.

His own son, Abdullah, had fought and survived, and he came to his father almost ashamed, as though he had failed to protect his uncle. And Umar, in his grief, would not embrace him. He said to him: How could you not have died before Zayd? He even told his son not to let him see his face. Abdullah answered gently and honestly. He said: Father, I was hoping I would be granted martyrdom before him, but my own lower self pulled me back. As for my uncle Zayd, he never stopped going forward, so Allah honored him with what I was not given. And it was true. The witnesses said that no one kept the relentless pace of Zayd at Yamamah.

Umar was not a man you would associate with weeping over the dead. He had once even thought that crying for the deceased was forbidden, until the Prophet ﷺ clarified that it was the wailing and tearing of clothes that was condemned, never the

quiet tears. And yet the histories say plainly that Umar never grieved over anyone the way he grieved over his brother Zayd. He would not stop mentioning him. He used to say a line that stays with you: the wind does not blow from the east but that I smell the scent of Zayd. Year after year, the wind carried his brother back to him.

He would say: May Allah have mercy on my brother Zayd. He beat me to the two beautiful things. He embraced Islam before me, and he was granted martyrdom before me. And in another version: everything I tried to do, he did first. He beat me to Islam, he beat me to the migration, and he beat me to martyrdom.

There is one more layer, and it is almost unbearable. One day a man was pointed out to Umar in Madinah, and he was told: that is the man who killed your brother at Yamamah. He had repented, accepted Islam, and was now living among the Muslims. Think of what a ruler of that age might have done, what tribal vengeance demanded. Umar lacked no strength to do any of it. He walked up to the man and said: Woe to you. You killed a brother of mine. The wind does not blow but that I remember him. And the man answered: O Commander of the Believers, Allah honored him through my hand, and He did not disgrace me through his. He meant that Zayd died the martyr he had always sought, and that he himself had been spared the dishonor of dying on the wrong side, because Allah had since guided him to the faith. It was not a comforting answer. But Umar weighed his sincerity, found it real, and let him live. The man who loved Zayd more than anyone alive looked his brother's killer in the face and chose justice over revenge.

What Zayd's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like Zayd's and admire the courage, the height, the dramatic death on the banner. But Zayd would be poorly served by admiration alone, because the deepest thing about him was never visible. It was hidden, between him and his Lord, and that is exactly what it asks of us.

Zayd worshipped in silence, and he was content to be unseen. He did not narrate much. He did not lead. He did not build a name. He put his head down, kept himself pure of the sins of the tongue, and gave his deeds quietly to Allah. This is the rarest and most precious form of sincerity, *ikhlas*: to do the work for Allah alone and to be entirely at peace that He has seen it, even when no one else ever will. We live in an age that measures a life by who noticed it. Zayd's life turns that measure over. Ask yourself how much of your good is done so that people will see it, and whether you could do even one good deed this week the way Zayd lived his entire life: in silence, for Allah, with no credit coming. That deed, unseen by everyone but God, may weigh more on the scale than all the things you do in front of others.

Zayd also longed for what was with Allah more than he feared losing this world. When his brother offered him armor, he waved it away, because the thing he wanted was not safety but his Lord's pleasure. That longing did not make him reckless or passive; it made him braver and more useful, fighting hard and pressing forward to the very end. This is what real hope in Allah looks like. It does not sit and wait. It works, it strives, it gives, and it trusts the outcome to the One who promised that nothing done for Him is ever wasted. You and I are not asked to seek a battlefield. But we are asked to want nearness to Allah more than we want comfort, and to let that wanting move our hands toward good today: a prayer prayed properly, a kindness to someone

under our authority, a tongue held back from harm, a charity no one knows about.

And there is the matter of the grave. The histories note that of all the martyrs of Yamamah, it was Zayd whose grave was once marked with the largest structure, the one that stood out, the one visitors would notice first. That is gone now, as all such structures should be, and there is a mercy in its disappearance, because it returns the whole question to where it belongs. Greatness with Allah was never about the monument over the body. Zayd's own brother, who would one day enter Paradise at the side of the Prophet ﷺ, testified that Zayd was more virtuous than himself. The station is with Allah, on the Day of Judgment, in a place no eye in this world can measure. The quiet man whose grave the world later forgot may be standing, on that Day, in a rank that would silence us all.

So take Zayd into your ordinary life. Do one good thing this week that no one will ever know you did, and give it to Allah. Hold your tongue where speaking would have wounded someone, and count that silence as worship. Want your Lord's pleasure more than you want to be seen. That is how the silent giant lived, and it is a path still open, today, to anyone willing to walk it without an audience. May Allah be pleased with Zayd ibn al-Khattab, and with the brother who wept for him, and may He raise us, loud and quiet alike, in the company of those He loves.

This chapter follows the account of Zayd ibn al-Khattab (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). No Qur'anic verse was quoted directly, as the lecture refers to Qur'anic themes (such as Allah's pleasure with those who pledged under the tree) without citing a verse text. Where the

histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Tulayha ibn Khuwaylid

The One Who Came Back

There is a kind of sin that seems too large to carry back. We imagine a line beyond which a person has gone so far that even the door of return must be closed to him, and we quietly place certain people on the far side of that line and stop expecting anything good of them. The story of Tulayha ibn Khuwaylid (may Allah be pleased with him) exists, in part, to break that assumption in us. He is, in the words of those who study the Companions, perhaps the most complicated man ever to be counted among them. He claimed to be a prophet of Allah. He raised armies against the Muslims. He killed beloved Companions with his own hand. And then, against every precedent, he came back. He repented to Allah, he was forgiven, and he died a martyr on the field of battle, fighting for the very faith he had once tried to extinguish.

To understand how heavy his return was, you have to understand first how far he had fallen.

The age of false prophets

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ once warned that the Hour would not come until nearly thirty liars had appeared, each one of them claiming to be a messenger of Allah, when he himself was the last of the prophets and there would be none after him. Across the centuries, the scholars have traced something close to that

number: men who managed to gather movements around the claim that revelation had come to them. This is no ordinary lie. It is disbelief of the very highest order, and the Qur'an names its gravity plainly:

Who could be more wicked than someone who invents a lie against God, or claims, 'A revelation has come to me,' when no revelation has been sent to him, or says, 'I too can reveal something equal to God's revelation'? If you could only see the wicked in their death agonies, as the angels stretch out their hands [to them], saying, 'Give up your souls. Today you will be repaid with a humiliating punishment for saying false things about God and for arrogantly rejecting His revelations.'

QUR'AN 6:93

That is the company Tulayha had chosen to keep. As the Prophet ﷺ lay dying and word of his illness spread across Arabia, the tribes that had only recently come to Islam began to read the political winds. Many had embraced the religion not because faith had settled in their hearts, but because Madinah had become the dominant power in the region and they wished to stand near it. Idol worship was finished. The new currency was tawhid, the Oneness of God, and so the ambitious among the tribal chiefs reasoned that the surest path to power was to become an extension of the man from Madinah. If Muhammad ﷺ was a prophet, why could they not be prophets too?

It was, at its root, opportunism dressed as religion. The first to try it was Musaylimah, the great liar, a false prophet and a murderer who consolidated real power and waged real war against the Muslims. There was even a woman, Sajah, a Christian poet of Banu Tamim, who looked at the men claiming prophethood and

decided to claim it too, gathering thousands of followers toward Iraq. And then there was Tulayha.

A chief, a poet, a horseman

His name is the diminutive of Talha, "little Talha," and though he shared a tribal name with others, he belonged to his own branch of Banu Asad, a powerful chief among his people. He was wealthy. He carried a commanding presence. He was a poet, and among the Arabs poetry was a kind of sorcery, a power over the hearts of listeners. He was also a celebrated horseman, and his lands sat closer to Madinah than the territory of Musaylimah, in the country between the two.

He had been an enemy from the beginning. Allied with the Quraysh of Makkah, he aided them for years in their effort to crush the new faith. His tribe took part in the great confederate assault against Madinah, the battle of the Trench, when the enemies of Islam massed every battalion they could gather to finish the religion in a single blow. All of this he did without ever once having met the Prophet ﷺ. He was a man living far from the source, fed a steady stream of propaganda from Makkah, which had convinced the distant tribes that the Prophet ﷺ was a threat come to break their idols, their tribes, and their families. Tulayha believed it.

When at last he came to the Prophet ﷺ, it was in the Year of Delegations, the ninth year after the migration, when tribes streamed into Madinah from every direction to enter Islam. Banu Asad arrived as a group of ten men, among them Dirar ibn al-Azwar, who would go on to become one of the most righteous warriors of the ummah. But on that day the man who spoke for the group came to the Prophet ﷺ with a complaint dressed as a boast. He told the Prophet ﷺ that they had braved the darkest of

nights and a difficult season to reach him, that the journey had cost them, and that he had not even sent them a messenger. He wanted favor for having come. He wanted the Prophet ﷺ to feel indebted to them for becoming Muslims.

It was about this very delegation that Allah revealed the answer:

They think they have done you [Prophet] a favour by submitting. Say, 'Do not consider your submission a favour to me; it is God who has done you a favour, by guiding you to faith, if you are truly sincere.'

QUR'AN 49:17

There are people across the world, the lesson runs, who would give every limb of their body for the chance to stand where these men stood and embrace this faith. Guidance is not a gift you hand to Allah. It is a gift He hands to you. Tulayha was a man who had not yet understood that. Faith had not entered his heart; he had only counted the politics and made his calculation. So when the Prophet ﷺ fell ill and the news reached him that Musaylimah, not far to his east, was claiming prophethood and gathering power, Tulayha made the calculation again. He had a region. He had tribes he could assemble. And so he too declared himself a prophet of Allah.

The lie made appealing

A false prophet needs miracles, and Tulayha began to manufacture them, small feats of visual deception meant to convince the credulous that something divine moved through him. But he had a sharper instrument than tricks, and it is the same instrument every great deceiver has reached for in every age. He removed the most inconvenient parts of the religion.

This is worth sitting with, because it is not a relic of the past. In every generation, the one who deviates from the truth in a large way begins by lifting from people the practices they find hardest, and the people who want to believe but are not ready to fully commit find that message wonderfully appealing. Tulayha sent a message to Madinah through his brother. Its content was that God did not command them to press their faces into the dirt in prostration, or to bend their backs like bows in prayer. They could pray standing up, quickly, and that would be enough. Like Musaylimah before him, he made lawful what Allah had forbidden and lifted away what Allah had made heavy. To tribes still finding their footing in a changing world, it was a tempting offer: keep your one God, but set down the burdens.

His was no small fitna. The scholars say that of all the trials Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) faced in those volatile two years after the Prophet's death, perhaps only the fitna of Musaylimah was greater. And Tulayha, unlike Musaylimah, was genuinely eloquent and a true horseman. Where Musaylimah's false verses sounded so absurd that even his own people mocked them, Tulayha spoke well, rode well, and was favorable to the tribes around him. He drew Banu Asad and others to his side. One chief joined him with the cold reasoning that a living prophet is better than a dead one. It was as cynical as it sounds. None of it was about God.

In one early clash, it is said, a strike from the legendary commander Khalid ibn al-Walid failed to find its mark, his sword breaking against armor. To the watching tribes it looked like proof: this man Tulayha was protected, special, a prophet after all. The lie was gathering weight.

The battle, and the flight

Abu Bakr would not let it stand. He understood that if a single pillar of Islam could be discarded in a systematic way, the whole structure would fall, which is why he was so unyielding about those who refused the zakat, treating that refusal as he would the abandonment of the prayer itself. He sent his commanders into the lands of apostasy. The campaigns came to be called the Wars of Apostasy, in the plural, because cleaning up what had spread across that country took not one battle but many.

The army that confronted Tulayha was badly outnumbered. The Muslims came with around six thousand men against Tulayha's force of roughly thirty-five thousand. Before the fighting began, two of the greatest Companions of the Prophet ﷺ rode out and were confronted by Tulayha and his brother. One was Ukkasha ibn Mihsan, the man famous for the words "you have beaten me to it," for when the Prophet ﷺ had spoken of the seventy thousand who would enter Paradise without reckoning, Ukkasha had asked him to pray that he be among them, and the Prophet ﷺ confirmed that he was. The other was Thabit ibn Aqram, an early Companion who had been at Mu'tah, the one who, when the banner fell, had placed it in the hand of Khalid ibn al-Walid. These were not ordinary men. They were among the closest to the Prophet ﷺ, among those furthest from hypocrisy. And in that encounter, both were killed by Tulayha and his brother.

Then the battle was joined, and Khalid ibn al-Walid did what he always seemed to do against impossible numbers. He attacked from multiple directions and broke the larger force. Tulayha fled. He fled not merely the battlefield but the entire region, and he went to live among a tribe in what is today Jordan, the same direction Musaylimah's defeated remnants had scattered. There he disappeared from the story of Islam, an apostate, a defeated false prophet, a man with the blood of two beloved Companions

on his hands. By every reasonable measure, that should have been the end of him.

"Would Abu Bakr accept my return?"

But some time passed, and in that distant place, Tulayha did something no one expected. He learned about Islam. For the first time he came to understand what the religion actually was, and as he understood it, the full weight of what he had done settled on him. He realized how deeply he had wronged himself. He came to his senses.

And then he faced the question that must have seemed impossible. There was no precedent for this. A false prophet does not come back. An apostate who organized armies against Madinah, who killed Companions, who claimed revelation, does not simply return and ask to be received. He went to the Muslims he could find and asked them, in effect, do you think Allah would accept someone like me?

He wrote a letter to Abu Bakr, and in it he placed a poem, and it is a powerful and humble thing. He said that he regretted the killing of Ukkasha and Thabit, every battle he had ever fought against the believers, and that greater than all of those crimes was his blindness, his stubborn inability to see the beauty of Islam. He said he had been driven from his homeland, a fugitive though he had never been a fugitive before. And then he turned directly to Abu Bakr and asked: would he accept his return, now that he had renounced everything he had done and bore witness to the truth and would not turn from it again? He came humiliated, he wrote, recognizing that the true religion was the religion of Muhammad ﷺ; and if he were not accepted, he had nowhere left to run, not to Syria, not to the Romans, because no one runs from Allah, who would take him back to Himself on this day or the next. He

admitted he had been a disbeliever and a hypocrite, that the devil had cast a fitna into his heart that made him the most wretched of men, and that he had broken his covenant the first time he said the word "Muhammad."

It was a hard letter to receive from such a man. But Abu Bakr read it, and he judged that Tulayha was sincere. He believed him.

The long road back to credibility

Sincerity, once declared, still had to be lived. Abu Bakr, in his wisdom, placed a temporary restriction on the apostates who returned to Islam: their repentance might be accepted, but they were kept away from the Muslim army for a time, because it was too dangerous to fold men with such histories into the ranks while the wounds were fresh. This was not a denial of their repentance. It was a measure of caution, lifted later once the hearts had been tested by time. Tulayha's return to Allah was real; his return to the trust of the community would take longer.

Tulayha himself was in no hurry to show his face. He was too ashamed to stand before Abu Bakr, the very man against whom he had raised an army. He made his way slowly, and he performed his pilgrimage. Picture the strangeness of it: this man, who had been a prophet's worst nightmare, now circling the Kaaba in ihram, praying, weeping. Among those who saw him was Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), and Umar was not inclined to gentleness. He looked at Tulayha and asked him directly how he imagined he could ever be safe from the Fire, when he had killed Ukkasha and Thabit, two men precious to Umar's own heart, two men far from any hypocrisy. And Umar told him plainly, with a candor that shows the human heart at its most honest, that he could not harm him now that he

was a Muslim, but that he would never love him, never like him, because of what he had done.

What can a man even say to that? Tulayha answered with humility, not self-justification. He did not say it was no great matter, that he had made those two men martyrs and done them a favor. He said, oh commander of the believers, those were two righteous men whom Allah honored with Paradise through my hand; and in His wisdom He did not allow me to die at their hands, for had I died then, as the disbeliever I was, I would surely have ended in the Fire. He understood Umar's pain and did not minimize it, but he pointed to the mercy hidden inside the decree: those two had been carried to Paradise, and he had been spared just long enough to find his way back. Umar heard the answer, recognized the sincerity in it, and his view of the man shifted.

When Tulayha later asked permission to fight in the army against the Persians, the same caution surfaced. Here was a man who had led armies against the Muslims now asking to fight beside them. But he was a gifted horseman, and he asked only for the chance to prove himself. So he was given it. And on the battlefield, he showed exactly who he had become. He did not hang back and protect his standing with a few safe strikes, as an insincere man would. He circled to guard the backs of the Muslims; he dove in first; he risked everything. A man who had returned only for advantage would have preserved himself. Tulayha threw himself forward, and his commanders saw the difference.

Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, who led the armies against the Persian Empire, wished to make use of him, and wrote to Umar. Umar's reply captures the whole delicate balance: consult him in matters of war, but do not put him in command of anything. The

repentance was accepted; the wisdom of caution remained. And so at the great battle of al-Qadisiyyah, the most famous clash between the Muslims and the Persians, Tulayha fought, a horseman whose worth was measured at a thousand men, who feared death not at all. At night he volunteered to slip all the way to the tent of the Persian commander Rustum himself, through tens of thousands of men; he scattered the horses, collapsed the tent, killed two guards and brought two captives back, returning with information that proved among the most consequential of the whole battle.

The Muslims won al-Qadisiyyah. Then came the battle of Nahawand, the blow that broke the Persian Empire for good. And there, leading a battalion, fighting with the courage that had become his signature, Tulayha ibn Khuwaylid was martyred, may Allah be pleased with him and forgive him. The man who once claimed to be a prophet died at the finish line, a martyr for the sake of Allah.

What Tulayha's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a story like this and reach for the comfortable lesson, the one about forgiveness in the abstract, and then set the book down unchanged. That would be a loss. Tulayha's life is not a curiosity. It is a question put to the most fearful and the most despairing corners of our own iman.

We do not know of a single other human being who went from claiming prophethood to dying a martyr. If the door of return was open to him, with all that he carried, then the quiet certainty so many of us hold, that our own sins have grown too heavy, that we have drifted too far, that Allah could not possibly want us back, is exposed for the whisper of the devil that it is. The first thing his life asks of you is to stop closing a door that Allah has left open,

not on yourself and not on anyone else. There are people we have written off, people who have hurt the community, people who seem beyond reach, and his story forbids us from shutting on them the very door Allah refused to shut on a false prophet. Repentance is not a reward for the nearly righteous. It is a mercy thrown to the drowning.

Look closely, too, at what made his return real. It was not the words of the letter alone, beautiful as they were. It was that he came humiliated, claiming no favor, justifying nothing. When Umar told him to his face that he would never be loved, Tulayha did not argue his own goodness; he submitted to the truth of another man's pain and pointed only to the mercy of Allah hidden inside it. That is the posture of sincere repentance, and it is the opposite of how the human heart wants to behave. We want to be received with credit. We arrive at Allah's door, as the delegation arrived at the Prophet's, half-expecting thanks for showing up. His life asks you to come instead the way he came: lowly, owing everything, claiming nothing, certain only that there is nowhere else to run.

And consider how he spent the life that was given back to him. He did not bank on his forgiveness and coast. He drove himself harder than the men who had never strayed, guarding their backs, diving in first, accepting that he must be consulted and not commanded, never protesting the caution placed on him as if his repentance entitled him to ease. This is the proof of true return: not the feeling of remorse, which passes, but the readiness to spend yourself for Allah afterward in obscurity, on terms you did not choose. Sincerity, *ikhlas*, is doing the deed for Allah even when you have been told you will not be loved for it, even when you will never command, even when the world

remembers what you were. He fought for the One who had forgiven him, not for the eyes of people who had not.

So take something from him into an ordinary day. If there is a sin you have decided is unforgivable, turn back to Allah today as though the door were open, because it is. If there is a person you have written off, leave their door to Allah and stop slamming it shut. And if Allah has already carried you back from something, do not rest on it; spend yourself for Him quietly, the way Tulayha did, asking for no credit and accepting whatever place you are given. Had he believed himself unworthy of return, had he chosen to vanish and die unknown in a distant land, the world would never have known the martyr he became. He took the step instead. May Allah be pleased with Tulayha ibn Khuwaylid, may He grant us the courage to take that same step toward Him before our own race is run, and may He let us finish, as Tulayha finished, turned fully toward our Lord.

This chapter follows the account of Tulayha ibn Khuwaylid (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (6:93, 49:17). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Ka'b ibn Zuhayr

The Poet of the First Burda

There is a kind of man who is dangerous not because of his sword but because of his tongue. In the age of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the poets were exactly that. They were the media of their time, the most potent voices in the society, the ones who could make a tribe famous or shame it into ruin with a few lines that people would carry from one gathering to the next. Every accusation Quraysh threw at the Prophet ﷺ was in truth a confession of their own weapons. They called him a poet, because poetry was their most trusted tool. They called him a sorcerer, because sorcery was a thing they tried to use against him. And the nastiest of the poets did not stop at mockery. They became warmongers, inciting the tribes against the Muslims and dragging the honour of Muslim women through the dirt of their verses.

Into this world a man was born who would inherit the throne of Arabic poetry, use it for years as a weapon against Islam, and then walk into the mosque of the Prophet ﷺ with his head wrapped, not knowing if he would leave alive. His name was Ka'b ibn Zuhayr (may Allah be pleased with him), and to understand him you have to begin with his father.

The son of the king of poets

Ka'b's father was Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulma, and in the world of the Arabs that name carried enormous weight. The Arabs had hung in the Kaaba seven great poems, the ones they considered the finest ever composed, the poems that held their history, their genealogy, and the precision of their language. These were not entertainment. They were the foundation of how a whole society understood itself, alongside the idols and the rites. To be the author of one of those hanging poems was to be one of the architects of the Arab mind.

Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulma was the author of the last of those seven. His long poem told of an old war between two great tribes, and of the man who paid out his own wealth in blood money to bring that war to an end. So honoured was Zuhayr that he amassed a fortune almost without rival, simply from his words. The man whose peacemaking he had praised would shower him with servants, wealth, and animals every time he laid eyes on him, in gratitude for being immortalised in verse. This was the standing into which Ka'b was born.

It tells you something about that culture, and about Islam's later judgement of it, to hear why Zuhayr was so admired. When Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) once asked Abdullah ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) to recite to him from the poet of all poets, and asked who that was, the answer was Zuhayr. And the reasons given were not only that his verse was eloquent. It was that he did not speak foolishness, did not betray sound logic, praised people only for what was actually in them rather than inventing flattery for a bribe, and spoke only of what he truly knew. His poetry was not just beautiful. It was wholesome. That is why it was permitted to keep reciting it even after Islam came: not because it rhymed, but because its words held nothing that contradicted what the believers held to be true.

The reluctant inheritance

Zuhayr did not want his son to be a poet. He had built a name, and he was afraid. Either Ka'b would be corrupted by the trade, as so many poets were, or he would fail to live up to the family standard and bring the name of Zuhayr down. So he forbade it. He even threatened the boy: if I ever hear you recite a line of poetry, I will strike you for every word. One man in this family is enough.

But Ka'b kept learning in private. He studied his father's verse line by line until he had the audacity to come to Zuhayr and recite his own. His father quizzed him, twisted lines on him, tested him in every way, and finally, impressed in spite of himself, granted his son the licence. Go ahead. You have the ability. The father assumed the son would carry on his spirit, and in time he did, though not in the way Zuhayr imagined.

There is one more thing the histories preserve about the father, and it is profound. In gathering all the knowledge a perfectionist poet needed, Zuhayr had learned the histories of the people of the Book, and he knew that they were awaiting a prophet in this land. Before he died he saw a dream: a rope hanging down from the sky, and he reached for it, but it was too far away. He understood it to mean that this awaited prophet would come, but that he himself would not live to grasp the rope. So he counselled his sons that if this chosen one ever appeared, they should embrace him. Then he died, before the Prophet ﷺ received revelation, and his two sons inherited his wealth and his throne of poetry. Ka'b, the elder, ascended at once as the master poet of the Arabs. His younger brother was Bujayr.

A weapon turned against the Messenger

The brothers were from a tribe that lived neither in Makkah nor in Madinah, but somewhere along the path of the migration. That distance gave Ka'b a luxury the poets of Makkah did not have. When revelation came, he did not have to respond to it immediately. He could keep his place at the festivals of ignorance, keep his wealth, keep the whole world that idol worship and the old order had built for him.

The poets, as a class, did not welcome the Qur'an. Think of what it meant for them. Their craft was suddenly frowned upon and exposed as hollow beside a recitation no human could match. Their standing in society, the festivals, the bribery, the exploitation, all of it had to be let go. It was, in a sense, like a celebrity of today being asked to walk away from fame itself, and worse. Some poets recognised at once that the Qur'an could not be the work of a man, and they submitted. Most took the opposite path. Ka'b was among those who turned hostile to what Islam represented and to what it threatened to take from him.

His hostility hardened when his brother left him. Bujayr, who had some poetry of his own, was camped with Ka'b in a valley near where the Prophet ﷺ was passing with his companions. Bujayr said he wanted to go and hear the man for himself. Ka'b did not. Bujayr went anyway, listened to the message, and embraced Islam, and he did not come back. He stayed. He became a companion, took part in the battles, and was counted among the early Muslims.

This enraged Ka'b. His brother had been taken from him by what he was sure was a cult of the brainless and the illiterate, the slaves and the simple folk who could be impressed by anything. He sent Bujayr lines of poetry, and they are worth hearing in their meaning. On what basis, he asked, besides your own lowly self,

have you been guided to this so-called message, onto a path you did not inherit from your mother or your father, a path you did not even find your own brother upon? Who gave you a cup of something intoxicating, that you drank from Abu Bakr's cup and staggered away from the dignity of your family and your great tribe?

When these lines reached the Prophet ﷺ, he found in them, of all things, something to praise. Ka'b had taunted his brother that he had not found his father or his mother upon this religion. And the Prophet ﷺ said that Ka'b was right about that one thing: Bujayr had indeed not inherited this from his parents. He had been brave enough to follow the truth even though his own family was not upon it.

After that, Ka'b only increased his attacks. From his safe distance he authored poem after poem, and his verses were carried into the public squares of Makkah and recited against the Muslims, insulting the Prophet ﷺ, insulting the believers, calling them every name, and dragging the honour of Muslim women into his lines. He had become a warmonger with a pen, and in time the Prophet ﷺ gave permission that this man, an enemy inciting against the Muslims, could be killed if he were found.

The world closes in

Then the ground began to shift beneath Ka'b. Badr, then the steady growth of the Muslims, then the conquest of Makkah. The festivals where his verses had once been welcomed grew dangerous to him. The public squares where his lines had been recited were now closed. He was a hunted man with a death sentence, and the earth, as he himself would describe it, began to constrict around him until it felt as though it were suffocating him.

It was then that his brother wrote to him. Bujayr, who had once received those cruel lines, now sent his elder brother a rescue. He had asked the Prophet ﷺ for permission to call Ka'b, and the Prophet ﷺ never refused to receive someone coming to him willingly and at peace. So Bujayr wrote, and because this was a family far too poetic even for ordinary letters, he wrote in verse. The meaning was a plea and a warning. Are you still blaming Islam unjustly, or have you finally seen that it is wiser and more coherent than anything you ever turned to? Turn to Allah alone, not to Lat and not to Uzza, so that you may be saved on a Day when only the one with a pure heart, a Muslim, will escape the Fire. The religion of Zuhayr, their father, was nothing but this, he said. Come to the Prophet ﷺ. He does not kill anyone who comes to him repentant. He has forgiven men who did far worse than you. He forgave Abu Sufyan. He forgave the people of Makkah. He is not out for your blood.

Bujayr also told his brother something about the psychology of that whole generation, a thing many of them quietly believed: that if Allah kept giving this Prophet victory, it meant he was upon the truth. Many people had said it. If he reaches his goal, we will follow, because that will mean he was upon something real. Ka'b, watching the victories mount, was now thinking exactly that. He decided he wanted to enter Islam.

The head unwrapped

What Ka'b did next took a particular kind of courage, because at any moment it could have killed him. He slipped into Madinah. He reached out to an old acquaintance and stayed with him quietly. Then he went to the mosque of the Prophet ﷺ at the time of the dawn prayer, with his head and face wrapped so that no one would know him, and he made his way close to the Prophet ﷺ.

He put his hand into the hand of the Messenger of Allah, and it seemed the Prophet ﷺ did not know who he was.

Then Ka'b, with the cleverness that was his whole life, spoke as though he were someone else, someone who could deliver the wanted man. He said: if Ka'b ibn Zuhayr came to you repenting, would you forgive him, if I were to bring him to you? The Prophet ﷺ answered that yes, if Ka'b came as a Muslim and repentant for what he had done, he would be forgiven. And at that, Ka'b unwrapped his face and said, I am Ka'b ibn Zuhayr, and I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that you are the Messenger of Allah.

It turned out everyone knew exactly who he was. One of the Ansar lunged at him at once. We finally have him. He is here in the mosque. Let me kill him. The Prophet ﷺ told the man to leave him alone. He has come repenting.

What happened next is the reason Ka'b's name endures. He was a poet, and he had clearly prepared for this moment. There, in the mosque, he recited to the Prophet ﷺ one of the most eloquent poems in the whole history of the Arabic language. It is called Banat Su'ad, which means She Has Departed, after a woman named Su'ad in its opening. It runs sixty lines, and remarkably, it does not even reach the Prophet ﷺ until around the fortieth. The first stretch seems to mourn a woman who left the poet, but the scholars of language read it as something deeper: Ka'b grieving the age of ignorance itself, the life of wealth and wine and travel and pleasure that had finally shown him its true face and abandoned him. Then, line by line, he turns toward the Prophet ﷺ.

He tells the Prophet ﷺ that he had been informed of the death sentence, but that pardon from a man like him is always to be

hoped for. He pleads, in effect: do not be hasty with me. You who have received all the wisdom and beauty of the Qur'an, with all its instruction, surely you will not rush. Do not believe everything that has been said about me. I know my reputation is dark by now, but not all of it is true. He describes his own dread so vividly that he says if an elephant stood where he was standing, hearing and seeing what he heard and saw, the elephant itself would tremble in fear before the Messenger of Allah. Who, then, was he, a small human being, before such authority. And then come the lines that crown the poem: that the Messenger of Allah is a drawn sword from whose light illumination is sought, one of the swords of Allah, a polished Indian blade unsheathed. He praises the Muhajirun, that small band of Quraysh who, when told to leave everything and march, simply rose and went.

The mantle

There was one more turn. Ka'b, still angry over the Ansar who had lunged at him, had praised only the Muhajirun. The Prophet ﷺ corrected him: you abused the Ansar with your tongue, now praise them with it. So Ka'b composed further lines in their honour, as it was right that he should.

Then the Prophet ﷺ stood, took off his own cloak, his burda, and placed it on the shoulders of the man who had walked in wrapped and afraid for his life. In the tradition of the Arabs, you rewarded a great poet by laying your mantle upon him, a sign that what he had said was beyond price. But this was the same gentleness with which the Prophet ﷺ had been softening the hearts of his old enemies. To a man giving up a life of serenading the kings and Caesars of the world, he was offering something better: here is my approval, here is my love. Ka'b never gave that cloak up. He wore it everywhere for the rest of his days. This is

the first burda, the original, the one actually recited to the Prophet ﷺ and rewarded by his own hand. The famous later poems that share the name were composed centuries afterward by other men in other lands. This was the first.

So it came to be said that the most eloquent poet of the age of ignorance was Zuhayr, and the most eloquent poet of Islam was his son Ka'b. The father had been the master poet of the days of darkness; the son became the master poet of the light. Zuhayr's fear had been for nothing. His name lived on, and his son carried it into a far higher honour. Ka'b stayed in Madinah, composing verse in praise of the Prophet ﷺ and in defence of the Muslims long after the Prophet ﷺ had passed, always wearing the cloak. Mu'awiya tried to buy it from him and was refused outright. Ka'b held it until he died, and his sons and grandsons all became poets after him. The trade that the father had feared would shame the family became, in the end, the family's gift to Islam.

What Ka'b's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a story like this and keep it at the level of a good ending, a clever man who talked his way out of a death sentence. That would be to miss what his life is actually asking of us.

Ka'b spent years on the wrong side. He used the finest gift he had, the gift inherited from his father, as a weapon against the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, against the believers, against the honour of Muslim women. He was an enemy with a sentence on his head, and he had earned it. And then he walked into the mosque, unwrapped his face, and was forgiven completely, his past wiped away and his gift turned overnight to the service of Allah. This is the first thing his life asks of you: never believe that your past has closed the door. The mercy that received Ka'b after all his verses is the same mercy that waits for you. To despair of it is to

misjudge Allah. Whatever you have done, the way back is to turn, sincerely, and ask, the way Bujayr promised his brother that no one who comes repentant is turned away.

Look, too, at the courage of his turning. He did not repent from a safe distance and send word. He carried his own neck into the city of the people who wanted him dead and put his hand in the hand of the man who could have ended him, because he had finally seen the truth and would not let fear keep him from it. That is what real repentance costs sometimes: not just a private regret, but a public turning that you cannot take back. Ask yourself what you are keeping wrapped, what truth you already know and are too afraid to act on. His life asks you to unwrap your face.

And there is the matter of the gift itself. Ka'b did not become someone else when he submitted. He was still the master poet. What changed was the One he served. The same tongue that had torn the believers down now lifted the Messenger of Allah ﷺ up, and Allah accepted it and honoured it with a mantle. You have a gift too, whatever it is, your work, your words, your skill, your influence over the people around you. The question his life puts to you is not whether you have something valuable, but whose service it is in. So much of what we do is poured out for the eyes of people, for standing, for the festivals of our own time. Ka'b shows that the very same ability, redirected to Allah, becomes something that outlives you by centuries. Take one thing you are already good at, the thing you would normally use to be admired, and spend a measure of it today purely for Allah, where no festival and no audience will reward you for it.

His father reached for a rope from the sky and could not grasp it, and counselled his sons to take hold of it if it ever came near. The

rope came near to Ka'b in a mosque at dawn, and he seized it. It is near to you now, in the truth you have already heard. May Allah be pleased with Ka'b ibn Zuhayr, who laid down his weapon and was clothed in mercy, and may He give us the courage to turn while the door is open, and to lay whatever we have at His feet alone.

This chapter follows the account of Ka'b ibn Zuhayr (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The poetry of Bujayr, of Ka'b, and of Banat Su'ad is conveyed in meaning, as in the lecture, not as exact translation. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Thumama ibn Uthal

The King Who Bowed to None but Allah

Most people who know the name Thumama ibn Uthal know only one scene from his life. He was tied to a pillar in a mosque, an enemy who had killed the Prophet's envoys, and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ let him go free. It is one of the most quoted examples of mercy in all of the seerah. But it is a fragment. Behind that single scene stands a whole life: a king who controlled the roads around two cities, a man who walked into worship hating everything about it, and a ruler who, when the test came, chose to vanish into the mountains rather than betray his faith for a crown. This is the story not of the fragment, but of the whole.

A king at the gates of two cities

To understand Thumama (may Allah be pleased with him), you first have to understand where he stood on the map. He was the chief of Banu Hanifah, but he was more than a tribal chief. He was Malik al-Yamamah, the king of Yamamah, a region that wrapped itself around the entire heartland of Arabia. It sat in the center, near what is today Riyadh, and from there it pressed against the lands of Makkah and Madinah on every side.

To the north lay the road to Sham, to Syria and Jordan; to the east, Iraq and the Persian Gulf; to the south, Yemen. The people of Makkah and Madinah depended on those trade routes for their

survival, and the caravans that fed the cities passed through territory a man like Thumama could choke whenever he wished.

He was, by any honest reckoning, one of the most dangerous men in Arabia to the young Muslim community. Some of the historians say the strategy with him was simply to leave him alone, so that the two cities could continue and the call to Islam could spread without provoking his wrath. And it was not only his own armies; his tribe was intermarried with Banu Bakr, bandits known across the desert as shadows who would strike and disappear and strike again. To upset Thumama was to risk being cut off from the world.

The letter and the killing

After the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah in the sixth year after the migration, the Prophet ﷺ entered the arena of global diplomacy. He sent letters to the kings of the earth, not merely to form treaties, but to call them to Islam: to Heraclius of Rome, to the ruler of Egypt, to Khosrow of Persia, who tore the letter apart and threatened him with assassination. To the kingdoms ringing Arabia he sent envoys with the same invitation.

A letter went to Thumama. It was not a hostile letter; it was a call to the truth. And Thumama did not merely refuse it. He killed the entire mission, every companion who had carried that message from the Prophet ﷺ. In the customs of that world, this was a declaration of war. Here was a man who could starve the cities, who commanded bandits and trade routes, and who had just shed the blood of believers. The community was, in effect, at war with him. Then Allah arranged what no strategist could have planned.

Captured on the road to the Kaaba

The Prophet ﷺ had dispatched a small force under Muhammad ibn Maslamah, thirty horsemen, to clean the desert of the mercenary bands that preyed on travelers despite the treaty. He rode far from Madinah, seven nights' distance, hunting groups of Banu Bakr, and in one of these raids he killed ten of them and took the rest as captives to bring back to the Prophet ﷺ.

He did not know that one of the men in his ropes was Thumama. The king had been traveling with Banu Bakr, on his way to Makkah to perform the lesser pilgrimage as an idol-worshipper, the way he always had. Muhammad ibn Maslamah saw only a large, powerful man in the robes of a ruler. He brought him back to Madinah among the captives and tied him to one of the pillars of the mosque.

The Prophet ﷺ looked up and recognized him at once. This was the man he had said was at war with the Muslims, whose blood could lawfully be taken for what he had done. Think for a moment what the world expected. To execute Thumama would freeze every hostile ruler in the region: we have killed the most powerful man among you, and you may be next. It was the obvious move, the political move.

The Prophet ﷺ did something else entirely.

Tied to a pillar, watching the prayer

He ordered that Thumama be tied to a pillar of the mosque, and then he gave an instruction that must have stunned everyone who heard it: bring this man the best food you have, and the best milk. Spoil him. Treat him well. So the captive who had murdered the Prophet's envoys sat bound in the house of Allah, and the Muslims came to him with good food and good words and gentleness, and he watched.

This is the quiet center of the whole story. The mosque of the Prophet ﷺ was not a fortress that opened its doors once a year. It was an open house, where anyone could walk in at any moment and find Muslims in their natural state: the beauty of their worship, the beauty of their character, the way a stranger was met not with suspicion but with care. Now the most powerful man in Arabia sat tied to its pillar, and five times a day he watched the believers stand before their Lord.

There is a sobering comparison the scholars draw here. A hypocrite of Madinah could sit in that same mosque for years, hearing every sermon and witnessing every prayer, and his heart would stay diseased and untouched. Yet if Allah wills to turn a heart, a few hours among the believers can do what years could not. Thumama sat bound and watched, and something in him began to move.

The Prophet ﷺ came to him and asked, "What do you have, Thumama?" The question was open, and Thumama answered it with the pride of a king even while tied to a post. He said, in effect: if you kill me, you kill a man whose blood will be avenged; if you show me favor, you favor a grateful man; and if you want money, name your price and I will bring whatever you ask. The Prophet ﷺ simply smiled and walked away.

The next day, the same question, the same proud answer, the same silent smile. The third day, the same. And then the Prophet ﷺ gave the order that made no political sense at all: "Let him go."

No ransom. He killed companions, yet no revenge was taken. He was wealthy enough to finance an army, yet no money was demanded. No price, no vengeance, no conditions. Just go. The

companions must have looked around at one another, wondering how they had let such a man walk free.

"Your face was the most hateful to me, and now it is the most beloved"

What no one in the mosque could see was that Thumama had already decided. He had resolved to become Muslim while still a captive, but he refused to declare it in chains. He did not want his people to say one day that the king had only submitted because he was a hostage with a sword at his neck. So he walked out, went to a grove of palm trees near Madinah, drew water and washed himself, and then returned, a free man, and in a loud and certain voice he bore witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.

The Prophet ﷺ was overjoyed. He called Thumama forward and embraced him, now as a brother. And then Thumama spoke words that show what truly happens when faith enters a heart. There had been no face on the earth he hated more than the Prophet's face, he said, and now it was the most beloved face in the world to him. No religion had he hated more, and now it was the most beloved of all. No land had he hated more than this land, Madinah, and now it was the most beloved land in the world to him.

Reflect on the size of that change. Days earlier he had looked at the city of the Prophet ﷺ the way an enemy looks at a place he wants to choke and destroy. Now its dust was dear to him. Some of the scholars take from his words a sign worth carrying: that loving Madinah is a mark of faith, that when iman enters the heart, love for the Prophet's city enters with it.

Then he raised the practical question of a new Muslim. Your soldiers, he said, caught me on my way to Makkah for pilgrimage; what do I do now? The Prophet ﷺ told him to go and perform the pilgrimage as a Muslim. This made Thumama the first Muslim to perform Umrah in the time of the Prophet ﷺ, before the conquest of Makkah.

So this once-hostile king set out for Makkah alone. When he began the rites, his voice rang out with the call of pure monotheism, while the idolaters still wrapped their pilgrimage in the worship of their idols. Some of the youth rushed to rough him up, and the elders pulled them back in alarm: that is Thumama; if he cuts our trade routes we are finished. They asked him, "Have you abandoned your religion?" He answered, "No, but I have submitted with Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah."

The barley and the boycott

What Thumama said next changed the balance of power between the Prophet ﷺ and the city that had driven him out. He told the people of Makkah plainly that not a single grain of barley would reach them until the Prophet ﷺ gave permission. They hoped he was exaggerating. He was not.

He returned to Yamamah and severed the trade routes. Grain stopped. Barley stopped. And nothing grows in the barren valley of Makkah; the city lived on what the caravans carried in. Hunger took hold, and the narrations describe them reduced to mixing blood into hide and frying it to stay alive. The proud city that had once thrown the Prophet ﷺ and his clan into a valley and starved them was now tasting the very thing it had inflicted.

This was no longer open war. Hudaibiyyah was a treaty, and the Prophet ﷺ had seemingly been humbled there, while the

persecution of the believers stretched back nearly two decades. Now one man, acting on his own faith, had brought Makkah to its knees without a single battle.

Some of the scholars connect this moment to a verse of the Qur'an, mentioning it as a possible occasion of revelation, a description of a people seized by hardship who still refuse to turn back to their Lord:

We have already afflicted them, yet they did not submit to their Lord: they will not humble themselves

QUR'AN 23:76

Here was Makkah, gripped by hunger, given the perfect opening to reflect on what it had done to the Prophet ﷺ and to the believers, to humble itself and return. And still it would not. It reached instead for politics.

Abu Sufyan sent a letter to the Prophet ﷺ, and the full circle of it is striking. He appealed in the name of Allah and of family ties: it is one thing for us to fight each other, but will you really let an outsider do this to your own kin in Makkah? He even tried to shame the Prophet ﷺ, writing that he claimed to be sent as a mercy to the worlds, yet here he was killing the fathers with the sword and the children with starvation. Every cruelty Makkah had inflicted on the Prophet ﷺ, it now begged him to lift from itself.

And the Prophet ﷺ agreed. He wrote to Thumama and told him to let the grain through. This is the lesson at the heart of it: the Prophet ﷺ is a mercy to the worlds, and he would not punish the innocent for the crimes of their leaders, nor learn his ethics from his enemies. He answered cruelty with mercy, exactly as he would later do on the day he entered Makkah in triumph and forgave the very people who had hounded him. Thumama

released the grain, and made sure Makkah knew it flowed only because of Muhammad ﷺ.

The crown he was willing to lose

This is usually where the story stops. It does not. Allah would test these new Muslims with the sincerity of their faith, and the test that came for Thumama was severe.

Many of his people had embraced Islam with him, but a tribal arrogance lingered in Yamamah. Why, they asked, should we who control this region submit to a man from Makkah and Madinah? Out of that resentment rose the worst trial of early Islam, breaking out from right under the king's nose: a false prophet named Musaylimah, from Thumama's own tribe of Banu Hanifah.

Musaylimah had written to the Prophet ﷺ while he was still alive, addressing him as one prophet to another and proposing that they divide the land between them. He took Yamamah by storm. He recited absurd lines he called revelation, poetry that mocked the very idea of the Qur'an, and he gathered a following.

Here is the hinge of Thumama's whole life. If he had not been sincere in his Islam, he could have kept his kingdom. He could have thrown his weight behind Musaylimah, ridden the wave of a man so many of his people already believed, and held onto his throne. Instead he stood against his own people. His skin is said to have crawled with disgust at the mention of Musaylimah. He warned them with the words of a man who could see where this road ended: beware of a dark affair with no light in it. He told them there is no prophet with Muhammad ﷺ or after him, just as Allah has no partner in His lordship, and he recited the real Qur'an beside Musaylimah's nonsense and asked how they could possibly accept such a liar.

And his own people gave him one of the most honest and most chilling answers in the whole episode. They told him, in effect: the liar of Banu Hanifah is more beloved to us than the truthful one of Quraysh. They knew what they had was false and what the Prophet ﷺ brought was the truth. But Musaylimah was one of them, and so they followed the lie with their eyes open.

Thumama refused to follow them into the fire, and he made the choice that defines him. He gathered the few who would stay Muslim, and he left. He abandoned the kingdom he had held his entire life, the wealth and the power and the throne, and joined the believing forces gathering nearby to stand against his own people and their false prophet. He had been willing to lose Makkah's grain to Allah; now he was willing to lose his crown to Allah.

A king who died unknown

And here is the detail that may be the truest measure of the man. Where did Thumama die? How did he die? We do not know. You can search the books of history for the grave of the king of Yamamah, the man who once enveloped two holy cities and could have paralyzed the region with a word, and you will not find it. He left it all for Allah, and slipped into history without a marked grave.

The Prophet ﷺ taught that if you must flee with your faith, flee, because your religion is worth more than anything you own. Thumama lived that to the end. A man who had spent his whole life as a king would rather meet Allah as an unknown servant in the mountains than buy back his throne with a single compromise. There is only the record of a companion who was, for a moment, perhaps the most powerful Muslim on the earth, who became the first to perform Umrah as a Muslim, who placed

Makkah under boycott, and who then handed every bit of it back to the One who had given it.

What Thumama's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a story like this and walk away admiring a strong man who made strong choices. That would be to miss what his life is actually asking of us. It is a question put to our own iman, and the question is sharper than it first appears.

Start with how he came to faith. He sat tied to a pillar, hating everything in front of him, and within a matter of hours his heart was overturned. He did not earn that; the hypocrite who sat in the same mosque for years was not given it. The lesson is one of the most humbling truths of our religion: guidance is in the hand of Allah alone. We do not manufacture our own faith, and we cannot take it for granted. The same Lord who turned the hardest heart in Arabia toward Himself in an afternoon can soften yours, and the one who has faith should beg Him, every single day, to die upon it.

Then there is the way he insisted on entering Islam as a free man, refusing to declare it in chains so that his submission would be his own and not the fruit of fear. That is ikhlas, sincerity, at the very threshold: he wanted his faith to be for Allah, owing nothing to coercion or to the eyes of his people. We rarely face his drama, but we face the quieter version of his choice constantly: do we worship, give, and obey because our hearts have truly turned to Allah, or because someone is watching, because it is expected, because it is convenient? He drew his line at the beginning, and the honesty of that first moment is worth imitating in every moment after it.

But the heart of his life is the crown he was willing to lose. When holding onto his kingdom meant backing a lie, he let the kingdom go. He had every worldly reason to compromise, an entire region urging him to, and his people's preference for the liar ringing in his ears. He chose Allah over belonging, over wealth, over power, over the approval of his own tribe. This is the question his life presses on us. What are we holding that we would not give up for Allah? A relationship that pulls us from Him, an income that will not survive honesty, a standing we are afraid to risk by being openly Muslim, a habit we keep choosing over His command. Thumama looked at a throne and decided his faith was worth more. Most of us are asked to surrender far less, and still we hesitate.

And notice where it all led. The world would have called him a fool: a king who lost his grip on a region to a charlatan and then died nameless in the hills. But that nameless death is precisely his honor. He understood that the only audience that matters had seen everything, and that a hidden grave under the eyes of Allah is worth more than a monument under the eyes of men. What you give up for Allah is never lost, and what looks like throwing your life away on the harder path may be the very thing that saves you. Makkah was seized with hunger and would not humble itself; Thumama was offered a throne and humbled himself before Allah instead.

So carry one thing from him into an ordinary life. Find the place where holding on to something is costing you nearness to Allah, and loosen your grip on it for His sake, quietly, without needing anyone to see. Ask Allah, the Turner of hearts, to keep yours fixed on Him and to take it back to Him when the time comes. That is how a king lived who would bow to none but his Lord. May Allah be pleased with Thumama ibn Uthal, have mercy on

him, and grant us the sincerity to choose Him over everything we are afraid to lose.

This chapter follows the account of Thumama ibn Uthal (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (23:76). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Muhammad ibn Maslama

The Knight of the Messenger

Begin with a question, the same one Dr. Omar Suleiman opens with. Was anyone named Muhammad before the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ received revelation? It is a strange thing to ask, because the name feels as though it has always belonged to the earth. But it had not. Among the Arabs, Muhammad was a rare name, almost unheard of, while names like Sa'd and Hind were repeated until they blurred together. That the name was chosen for the Prophet ﷺ, and that it had been kept so scarce, was itself one of the quiet blessings around his birth.

And yet there were a handful of men, perhaps five in all of Arabia, who carried that name before him. The reason, al-Qadi Iyad suggested, is that as the time of the awaited prophet drew near, some people asked the rabbis and the priests about the one foretold in the Torah and the Injil, and from the description a few of them drew out the name, or something close to it, and gave it to their sons in hope.

Of all those men, only one became a companion of the Prophet ﷺ. His name was Muhammad ibn Maslama (may Allah be pleased with him). Consider what it means to share a name with the greatest human being who ever lived. It means being completely overshadowed. There is likely not a single person on earth ever named after this man, because the one who carried the name before him eclipses everyone, and so a remarkable

companion slips quietly out of memory, and we have to go looking for him.

A man of few words and great presence

He was from the tribe of Aws in Yathrib, the city that would become Madinah, one of the two great tribes of the Ansar. He embraced Islam very early, at the hands of Mus'ab ibn Umayr (may Allah be pleased with him), the gentle ambassador the Prophet ﷺ had sent ahead to teach. Ibn Sa'd records that he became Muslim before Sa'd ibn Mu'adh, before Usayd ibn Hudayr, before many of the famous early names of the Ansar. He was among the very first.

He was about eighteen years younger than the Prophet ﷺ, and the descriptions of him are vivid. He was tall and extremely strong, very dark of skin, counted among the black companions of the Prophet ﷺ in the early collections of Ibn al-Jawzi and al-Suyuti. He was strikingly handsome, and above all he had haybah: an awe, a gravity, so that anyone who saw him was immediately captured by him. And he spoke little, the kind of man who only speaks when he must, and around such a man people grow careful, even embarrassed to speak, afraid of saying the wrong thing in his presence.

This is part of why he vanishes from the histories. The seerah remembers talkers, and a man who keeps silent leaves fewer traces, though his actions were enormous even when his words were not. The Prophet ﷺ paired him in brotherhood with Abu Ubaidah ibn al-Jarrah (may Allah be pleased with him), the trustworthy one of this ummah, and the two men were so alike that you could take sentences from the biography of one and slip them into the biography of the other and never notice the seam. Two quiet, trustworthy, God-fearing men under one roof. Imagine

the night prayer in that house. The Prophet ﷺ liked to join souls that resembled each other, and these two were, as the hadith says, like soldiers gathered in ranks, drawn together by a likeness Allah had placed in them.

He brought his whole family into Islam: his wives, his many children, his brother Mahmud, his sister Umm Abs. He had sixteen documented children, and he named them after the early emigrants, the Sabiqun of the Muhajirun. That small detail tells you what his heart loved. A man who names his children after the first believers is a man whose imagination lives in the company of the faithful.

The watchman of Madinah

When the Prophet ﷺ reached Madinah, Muhammad ibn Maslama was given a role that suited him exactly. He became the perpetual murabit, the watchman, the eye that guards the borders. The Prophet ﷺ said that two eyes will never be touched by the Fire: an eye that weeps from the fear of Allah, and an eye that spends the night standing guard over the Muslims. Every word of that would have been sweetness in the ears of Muhammad ibn Maslama, because that watching was his life.

There is a lesson here that is easy to walk past. The companions accepted the roles the Prophet ﷺ gave them and did not strain against them. This man knew what Allah had made him for, and he did not try to be someone else. He did not chafe because another companion preached while he patrolled in the dark. He stood where he was placed. He told his children that he had witnessed every single battle alongside the Prophet ﷺ except Tabuk. Ask him about any expedition, he said, and he could recount it all, except that one, because the Prophet ﷺ had left

him in charge of Madinah itself while the army was away. He was trusted to hold the city.

He was at Badr, and so he carried the honour of the Badriyun, the people of Badr, who are the best of the companions. The night before Uhud, he circled the Muslim camp until dawn with fifty men under him, so the army could not be ambushed in the dark. When Khalid ibn al-Walid, before his Islam, struck the Muslims from behind at Uhud and the lines broke, Muhammad ibn Maslama was among those who ran to the Prophet ﷺ and shielded him with his own body, taking blow after blow to keep the Messenger of Allah safe. At Hudaibiyyah he rode ahead with twenty horsemen to secure the wells, and caught fifty men moving to attack the Prophet ﷺ before any negotiation had even begun. History turns on nights like that, on a watchman who does not sleep.

The order that was an exception, not a rule

After Badr, the Prophet ﷺ gave Muhammad ibn Maslama one of the heaviest assignments of his life, and to understand it we have to be careful and honest. The Prophet ﷺ forgave. Forgiveness was his way. Dr. Omar Suleiman is exact about this: you can name dozens of people who insulted the Prophet ﷺ and were not harmed, people who stood before him with a blade and were let go, the people of Ta'if who stoned him and for whom he prayed. The grace of the Messenger of Allah was the rule. The exceptions were few, and they were not impulse. They were the men who were a present and active danger, in the very midst of their atrocity.

One such man was Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf. He was a poet, a warlord, and one of the wealthiest men in Yathrib, with a fortress on the city's edge whose ruins still stand today. From the moment the

Prophet ﷺ arrived, Ka'b set himself against the new community and worked to poison the pact between the Prophet ﷺ and the Jewish tribes. While it was only poetry and incitement, the Prophet ﷺ held back and worked to keep Madinah together. But after Badr, Ka'b crossed into something else. He composed vile poetry targeting the Muslim women. And then he rode to Makkah, to the elites he traded with, found them defeated and grieving, and stoked their rage. Rise up, he told them, you have everything you need, go back and kill Muhammad ﷺ and his companions. It would not be an exaggeration to trace the battle of Uhud itself to the incitement of Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf.

There is a moment in Makkah that exposes the man's heart. Abu Sufyan, himself an enemy of Islam, was puzzled by Ka'b's hatred and asked him plainly: which religion is more beloved to you, ours or the way of Muhammad ﷺ? The scriptures of the People of the Book stood far closer to Islam than the idolatry of Makkah did, and Abu Sufyan knew it. Yet Ka'b answered that the idolaters were nearer to him, that their way was dearer to him than the Prophet's. The Najashi of Abyssinia had seen the truth at once, and Abdullah ibn Salam, the chief rabbi of Madinah, had seen it and believed. The difference was never the text. It was the condition of the heart.

This is the context the Qur'an gives for those who were given Scripture and still sided with falsehood:

Do you not see how those given a share of the Scripture, [evidently] now believe in idols and evil powers? They say of the disbelievers, 'They are more rightly guided than the believers.' Those are the ones God has rejected: you [Prophet] will not find anyone to help those God has rejected.

QUR'AN 4:51-52

So the Prophet ﷺ stood and asked, "Who will deal with Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf for me? He has harmed Allah and His Messenger." Muhammad ibn Maslama answered, and notice the care of a man who knew how often the Prophet ﷺ chose mercy. He asked, in effect, "O Messenger of Allah, do you truly mean for me to do this?" The Prophet ﷺ said yes. Only then did he move. He went, with Ka'b's own foster brother who had become Muslim, and through patient cunning drew the warlord out of his fortress at night, complimented his perfume, asked to come close enough to smell it, and carried out the order, and the group slipped away before the alarm was raised. When Banu Nadir came to complain, they found they had no ground to stand on, for the man had been inciting open war against the Messenger of Allah. The scholars explain it as the pharaoh of this ummah being removed, the way Abu Jahl had to be removed, while the Prophet ﷺ forgave so many others, because some threats, left alive, would have cost the lives of many.

The sword and the breaking of it

Of all the narrations about him, the one that should stay with us longest is about a sword. In the collections of Muslim and Imam Ahmad, Muhammad ibn Maslama relates that the Prophet ﷺ gave him a sword and told him to fight the idolaters with it. This was a weapon for war, placed in the hand of the knight of the Messenger. But then the Prophet ﷺ added something astonishing. He said: when you see the Muslims begin to turn their swords against one another, take this sword to Uhud and strike it against the mountain until it breaks. Then sit in your house until death comes to you, by someone's hand or by your appointed time.

Sit with that. The Prophet ﷺ did not only tell him to stop fighting when fitna comes among the believers. He told him to break the sword. If you think there is any chance you will not be able to control yourself once the trial begins, then destroy the very means of taking part. When people start tearing each other apart, withdraw from the conversation completely, because you will not untangle it. When Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz was pressed about an old dispute, he said it was a trial that Allah had kept his hands clean of, so why would he now dip his tongue into it? Break your sword. If you cannot keep yourself steady online, deactivate. If you cannot sit with certain people without sliding into something ugly, stop sitting with them. If a situation keeps dragging you into the same sin, abandon the situation. The Prophet ﷺ was teaching a man how to keep his soul intact when the world around him caught fire.

And Muhammad ibn Maslama took the lesson to heart and held it for the rest of his life.

Umar's trusted hand

Because he was a man safe from hypocrisy, the way Abu Ubaidah was, he was loved by the one who loved Abu Ubaidah most: Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him). When Umar became the leader of the believers, he made Muhammad ibn Maslama something like his head of intelligence, but an intelligence that existed to protect, not to ruin lives. When anyone complained about a governor, Umar sent Muhammad ibn Maslama to investigate. The companions, it was said, loved having him beside them in battle and dreaded having him arrive to examine their affairs.

When Umar sent him to question Amr ibn al-As, who had governed Egypt and grown wealthy, Amr laid out a fine meal to

soften the mood. Muhammad ibn Maslama only stared at it, then drew a piece of dry bread from his own pocket and ate that instead, because he had come to account for what a man owned, not to be his guest. He once burned down a gate that Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas had built between himself and the people, on Umar's order, and Sa'd, who knew the order was just, did not object. There would be no barrier between those who lead and those they serve.

But this accountability ran both ways, and that is its beauty. One day Umar asked him, "How do you see me?" Muhammad ibn Maslama answered that he saw him as those who love him would wish, just in gathering wealth and just in distributing it. And then he said that if Umar were ever to swerve from justice, "we would straighten you the way an arrow is straightened against its notch." Imagine saying that to the most powerful man on earth. And Umar, far from anger, replied, "Praise be to Allah, who has placed me among people who will straighten me if I bend."

There is a scene that holds the whole spirit of the age. Muhammad ibn Maslama was once asleep under a tree near Khaybar, no bodyguards, unafraid, because a man who rules with justice does not fear the people. A woman came and gently shook his foot, then poured out her trouble to a stranger she sensed was good. She was a mother of orphans, and the year before, when zakat was distributed, she had been overlooked. Now she had heard Muhammad ibn Maslama was coming again, and she wanted to reach the leader of the believers so she would not be missed twice. She did not realize she was speaking to Umar himself, who happened to be passing, and when Umar summoned Muhammad ibn Maslama, the giant whose name had frightened her, she shrank back in fear. Umar pressed his trusted knight: do you remember how poor we once were, how few, how

surrounded, when we had only a single animal's head to feed us all? Have you forgotten? Muhammad ibn Maslama wept and said he had not missed her on purpose. He was told to give the woman her share for this year and the share he had missed the year before. No one, not even the Prophet's own knight, was beyond being held to the right of a single forgotten widow.

Breaking the sword, and the long stillness after

Umar passed, and the years grew heavier. Muhammad ibn Maslama served on, took part in the conquests, and when the great fitna came and the believers began to divide over the fate of Uthman, he tried with others to protect the caliph and to reason with the people who had come to harm him. He even rode toward Egypt to intercept them. But the fire could not be put out, and Uthman was killed.

Now the believers turned their swords on one another, exactly the moment the Prophet ﷺ had warned him about decades before. Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman, the keeper of the Prophet's secrets, the one who knew the names of the hypocrites, had said that there was not a single man he did not fear fitna for, except Muhammad ibn Maslama, because he had heard the Prophet ﷺ say the trial would not harm him. And what did Muhammad ibn Maslama do? He remembered. He took the sword the Prophet ﷺ had given him, carried it to Mount Uhud, and struck it against the rock until it broke. Then he went home. He fashioned for himself only a small wooden sword and hung it in his house, he said, in case someone attacked him and he needed to frighten them off. But the real weapon was gone, broken by his own hand, exactly as he had been told.

He withdrew to a stretch of barren land called Ar-Rabadha, far out on a beaten path hundreds of miles from Madinah, the same

lonely country where Abu Dharr had gone to die. He pitched his tent there and asked only to be kept clear of the fitna. Abu Burdah relates passing through Ar-Rabadha and seeing a worn-out tent, and there was Muhammad ibn Maslama. They said to him, this is the knight of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, surely you should go out to the people and command good and forbid evil. He refused. The Prophet ﷺ, he told them, had ordered him that when the Muslims raised their swords against one another, he should break his sword and sit in his house. This fitna, he said, flee from it like the plague. Do not put your tongue in it, nor your hand, nor your sword.

And it was only his decree that even there, having abandoned every quarrel, a bitter man came to him out of Sham, angry that he had stayed out of the fighting, entered his tent, and killed him. As Abu ad-Darda said, people are like thorns: leave them or do not leave them, and they will sting you all the same. He was martyred at seventy-seven and buried in Madinah, the city he had guarded through so many sleepless nights. The companion named Muhammad, who spent a lifetime in the shadow of the name, returned at last to the city of the one who carried it first.

What Muhammad ibn Maslama's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read of a man this brave and feel only distant admiration, to picture the giant with the awe-inspiring presence and decide he has nothing to ask of an ordinary life. That would miss him entirely. His life is not a statue to look up at. It is a question pressed against our own iman.

Here was a man who knew what Allah had made him for, and did not strain to be anyone else. He was the watchman, not the speaker, and he poured himself into the watching without resentment that another's gift was louder than his. Most of us

waste our faith wishing we had someone else's role, envying the brother who teaches or the sister who leads, neglecting the quiet good that is actually ours to do. He asks you to accept the place Allah has given you and to fill it completely for Allah's sake, because the eye that guards the border in the dark is beloved to Allah even when no one sees it and no history records it. Do the unglamorous good. Stand the watch you have been given.

And then there is the sword. Of everything in his life, the breaking of the sword is what should reach into your week. The Prophet ﷺ did not trust him merely to stop when the trial came; he told him to destroy the means of being dragged in. This is mercy, not weakness. It is the honesty to admit that some situations will defeat your self-control, and the courage to walk away before they do. When believers tear at one another and your heart begins to burn, withdraw. When a screen pulls you into anger and backbiting night after night, close it, deactivate it, break it. When a habit keeps sliding you into sin, leave it altogether rather than trust yourself to resist one more time. Guarding your tongue and your hands from the harm of fitna is itself an act of worship, a way of keeping your soul clean for the One who will ask you about it.

Notice too how he held justice in both directions, and feared no man because he wronged none. He ate his own dry bread rather than be softened, and he told the caliph to his face that he would be straightened like an arrow if he bent, all because he answered to Allah before he answered to anyone. That is what frees a person from fear of people: to owe everything to Allah and nothing to their approval. Live so that you have wronged no one, and you will sleep under the tree without bodyguards, because the only One whose reckoning you dread is the One you have already given your life to.

So take one thing from him into the ordinary days ahead. Do the quiet good that is yours, the way the watchman watched, with no audience but Allah. And when something keeps pulling you toward harm, find the strength to break the sword, to remove yourself entirely, for the sake of the One who taught his knight to do exactly that. May Allah be pleased with Muhammad ibn Maslama, the knight of the Messenger ﷺ, grant us his steadiness when the world catches fire, and gather us with the faithful who guarded their hearts for Allah alone.

This chapter follows the account of Muhammad ibn Maslama (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (4:51-52). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Umayr ibn Wahb & Safwan ibn Umayyah

The Conspirators Whom Allah Turned

There is a kind of story in the seerah that we usually meet only as a single line. A man comes within inches of murdering the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and then, somehow, that same man dies a believer with a sword in the path of Allah. We read the line, we marvel for a moment, and we move on. But behind some of those lines there is a whole life turning on its axis, a heart set as hard as stone being softened by a hand that refused to strike back. The story of two cousins from Makkah is exactly that, and it is worth slowing down for, because what Allah did with them, He can do with anyone.

These two men were Umayr ibn Wahb and Safwan ibn Umayyah (may Allah be pleased with them). Their lives were so tightly bound that you cannot honestly tell the one without the other. To follow them is to watch two ways a hardened heart can finally break open: one suddenly, in a single overwhelming moment, and the other slowly, worn down by patience and generosity until there was nothing left to resist.

The proud house of Banu Jumah

To understand these men, you have to understand the house they came from. Their tribe was Banu Jumah, one of the elite clans of Makkah, smaller in number than some but distinguished

by its wealth. They held the office of perfuming the idols, and they largely ran the fragrance trade of the city, so that the sweet scents and oils of Makkah traced back to them. Wealth like that breeds a certain pride, and Banu Jumah had it.

The chief of the tribe was Umayyah ibn Khalaf, and his name should make any believer pause. Umayyah was the master who tortured Bilal, who dragged him through the burning streets and crushed him under a stone while Bilal answered with one word: One, One. From the same proud house came another infamous enemy, Ubayy ibn Khalaf, who would earn a grim distinction. He swore openly that he would kill the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and at Uhud he pursued him until the Prophet ﷺ threw a spear that nicked him on the side of his throat. He is the only man who died from the hand of the Prophet ﷺ himself. The Prophet ﷺ said the worst person on the Day of Judgment is the one who killed a prophet, or whom a prophet killed.

This is the bloodline our two cousins inherited. Safwan was the son of Umayyah ibn Khalaf, the chief. Umayr was the son of Wahb, Umayyah's brother, which made the two men first cousins. They were not the wide-eyed young descendants of the chiefs; they were grown men, nobles in their own right, with wives and children old enough to fight. They had inherited their fathers' enmity, and they carried it with pride. Umayr in particular had insulted the Qur'an and harmed the Muslims so severely that his hatred needed no introduction.

Badr, and a sky no one could see

Then came Badr, and the world of these proud men cracked.

Before the battle, the Makkans dispatched Umayr ibn Wahb as a scout, for he was a skilled spy. He rode out, studied the Muslim

army, and came back with a report that was uncannily precise: three hundred men, every horse, every shield, every spear counted exactly. But Umayr came back uneasy. While the others, led by Abu Jahl, saw an easy victory over an outnumbered and underequipped band, Umayr said he had a bad feeling. Something about the certainty in those men, the faith in their faces, did not look right to him. He counselled retreat. Abu Jahl shamed him for it, and the army marched.

The Qur'an preserves a scene from that day that most of us read without realising whose memory it is. Umayr ibn Wahb himself later narrated it, after he had become a believer. He had watched Iblis appear at Badr in the form of Suraqah ibn Malik, urging the Makkans on, promising them that no one could defeat them. And then, the moment the two armies came within sight of one another, this confident figure suddenly turned and fled, abandoning them. Umayr saw it with his own eyes and could not understand it. Allah explains what Umayr could not:

Satan made their foul deeds seem fair to them, and said, 'No one will conquer you today, for I will be right beside you,' but when the armies came within sight of one another he turned on his heels, saying, 'This is where I leave you: I see what you do not, and I fear God: God is severe in His punishment.'

QUR'AN 8:48

What Iblis saw, and they could not, was the other army. While the two human armies faced each other, two unseen armies were also facing each other, the angels and the devils, and we are not usually let in on that meeting. The Prophet ﷺ said the worst day of the year for Shaytan, after the Day of Arafah, is the day he saw Jibril descend to the field of Badr with the angels, and he fled.

Umayr ibn Wahb stood inside the very moment the Qur'an would later describe, on the wrong side of it.

His own escape from Badr is its own marvel. Umayr fought bravely on horseback until he was knocked off and wounded. He felt a Muslim drive a sword through him until, he said, the tip struck the stones beneath him. The man who struck him believed he was dead and left him among the slain. Then night fell, and Umayr woke up. Picture it: a man opening his eyes in the dark of the desert, surrounded by seventy corpses of his own people, a sword wound through his body, and somehow breath still in his lungs. He rose from between the dead, made his way back to Makkah, and treated his wound until he recovered. Allah had let a sword pass through this man and still kept him alive. He was being saved for something, though he did not yet know it.

A conversation in the shade

Makkah after Badr was a city drowning in grief and rage. Every home had lost someone. Their dead were buried, and the believers could console themselves that their own dead were in Paradise, but what does a grieving disbeliever have to hold on to? Nothing but vengeance.

Safwan ibn Umayyah carried a particular bitterness. His father, the chief Umayyah ibn Khalaf, had been killed at Badr by the very man he used to torture, by Bilal. The master who had crushed Bilal under a stone was struck down by the slave he had tried to break, and it left Safwan burning.

So Umayr and Safwan went walking together, the way grieving men do, talking to pass the weight of their sorrow. They sat in the shade of the Kaaba, in the Hijr of Ismail, and they spoke of the dead of Badr, of the mass grave where Abu Jahl and the others

lay, of fathers and uncles and friends now gone. Safwan said there was no sweetness left in life after them. And then Umayr let his tongue slip. He swore that if he were not buried in debt he could not pay, and if he did not have a family he feared to leave behind, he would ride to Madinah and kill Muhammad ﷺ himself. He even had the perfect cover: his own son was a prisoner of the Muslims at Badr, so he could enter Madinah on the pretext of ransoming him.

Safwan saw his opening at once. The richest man in Makkah told his cousin to consider it done: I will pay every debt you owe, and your family is my family, I will provide for them as long as they live. Now you have no excuse. Umayr agreed, and they swore the plot would stay between the two of them, known to no one else. Umayr took a sword, had it dipped in poison, concealed it, and set out for Madinah with one intention, to put that blade through the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and to die doing it.

The plot recited back to him

He arrived to find the Prophet ﷺ sitting in the mosque, surrounded by young companions, while Umar ibn al-Khattab spoke to them about the day of Badr, about the angels and the humiliation of the enemy. Umar saw Umayr ibn Wahb at the door, sword hanging at his neck, and read the danger instantly. That dog is the enemy of Allah, he said. By Allah, he has come with nothing but evil. He told the companions to guard the Prophet ﷺ, then seized Umayr by the strap of his own sword, choking him, and dragged him in.

The Prophet ﷺ told Umar to release him, and let Umayr come close while Umar stood ready to break his neck. Umayr offered the old greeting of ignorance, and the Prophet ﷺ gently corrected him, telling him that Allah had given the believers a

better greeting, the greeting of the people of Paradise, peace. He asked Umayr why he had come. To ransom my son, Umayr said. The Prophet ﷺ asked about the sword on his neck, and Umayr, half hiding his contempt, said may Allah ruin these swords, they did us no good at Badr anyway. Again the Prophet ﷺ asked him the truth of why he had come, and again Umayr gave the same answer.

Then the Prophet ﷺ spoke. He told Umayr that he and Safwan had sat together in the Hijr, that they had spoken of the dead of Badr, and that Umayr had said: were it not for my debt and my family, I would go and kill Muhammad. And he told him that Safwan had answered: I will carry your debt and provide for your family. The Prophet ﷺ recited the secret conversation back to him, word for word, a conversation that had passed between two men alone in the shade of the Kaaba, with no one to overhear it and no possible way for any messenger to have outrun him to Madinah with it.

Umayr stood there as the entire plot was laid open before him. And his hard heart broke in a single instant. I bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah, he said. By Allah, no one was present for that conversation but me and Safwan, and no one could have brought it to you but Allah. He gave thanks to the One who had guided him onto this path, and he took the shahadah. Umar, who moments before had wanted to snap his neck, embraced him and said Allahu akbar and welcomed him. The Prophet ﷺ told the companions to teach their new brother his religion and the Qur'an, and to return his son to him.

Umar would later describe his own turning of heart with brutal honesty. A pig, he said, would have been more beloved to me

than Umayr when he walked in. And now he is more beloved to me than my own children.

The return, and the cousin left behind

The plot had been a secret between two men. Back in Makkah, Safwan was waiting, giddy, telling people that great news would soon arrive from Madinah, something that would make them forget the horror of Badr. He went out to the road, asking travellers for word, expecting to hear that Muhammad ﷺ was dead. Instead he was told that Umayr had become a Muslim and was already on his way home a believer. No way, Safwan said. There is no way. When Umayr returned, Safwan looked at him, knew the truth at a glance, swore he would never speak to him again or do anything for him, and turned his back on his own cousin.

Umayr did not retreat into the safety of Madinah. He came to the Prophet ﷺ and said: I used to strive to put out the light of Allah, and I used to harass anyone who followed His religion. Let me go back to Makkah and call them to Islam. It was the most dangerous time imaginable to do so, with Makkah still boiling from Badr. But the Prophet ﷺ gave him leave, and Umayr went quietly and wisely among his people and brought a significant number of them to Islam. Then he made the journey back, and it is a sight worth holding in the mind: the same man who had once entered Madinah with a poisoned sword now entered it leading a small caravan of new Muslims, reading the Qur'an aloud from the back of his camel. He fought beside the Prophet ﷺ in every battle after, and his son, freed from captivity, became a companion too, a commander who died a martyr in Sham.

Safwan, and the long, slow softening

Safwan ibn Umayyah was the harder case. He was, in many ways, more stubborn even than Abu Sufyan. He was the richest man in Makkah, married into nearly every household of enmity against the Prophet ﷺ, and the warehouses of weapons he kept supplied the battles waged against the Muslims. When his friend Khalid ibn al-Walid once hinted that he was thinking of accepting Islam, Safwan swore that if every last person in Quraysh became Muslim except one man, he would be that man. He killed my father, he killed my brother, Safwan said, and you want me to follow his religion?

When Makkah was finally conquered, Safwan was among the few who tried to fight, ambushing the column led by Khalid, then fleeing toward the sea to escape to Yemen, knowing he had been named among those who would not be spared. His wife accepted Islam. And then Umayr ibn Wahb, his cousin, came once more to the Prophet ﷺ and asked for a chance to save him, just as he had once been saved. Give me proof that I come on your authority, Umayr said, so my cousin will believe he has amnesty. The Prophet ﷺ took off his own cloak and gave it to him.

Umayr caught Safwan at the water's edge, about to board a boat. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ is calling you back and offering you safety, he said. Safwan did not believe him, certain it was a trick, until Umayr held out the Prophet's cloak as proof. To his credit, Safwan would not fake belief. He came back still a disbeliever, prepared only to negotiate. Riding up before the Prophet ﷺ could even address him, he called out in front of everyone: is it true this man gave me your cloak and your promise of safety? It is true, the Prophet ﷺ said. Then let me hear your message, Safwan said, and if I like it I will accept it, and if not, give me two months. He was still setting terms with the very Prophet whose

men he had just been fighting. The Prophet ﷺ gave him four months instead of two.

So Safwan walked among the Muslims as a non-believer who had given his word, and he watched. He even went out to fight at Hunayn at the Prophet's side, still not a Muslim. Before the battle the Prophet ﷺ asked to borrow some of his armour. Safwan asked, half wary, are you forcing me, or asking? The Prophet ﷺ said it was a request, freely given, and that everything would be returned in its condition. After the battle, looking over the spoils, Safwan caught the Prophet ﷺ gazing at a valley full of camels. You like all this, the Prophet ﷺ said. It is yours. He gave him a hundred camels, then another hundred, then another hundred. Safwan stood there astonished. No one gives like this, he thought, except a man who is truly a prophet, nothing like the warlords he knew.

And there, at last, Safwan's heart gave way. He told the Prophet ﷺ he was ready. He said of him afterward that the Prophet ﷺ kept on giving to him until, from being the most hated man on earth to him, he became the most beloved. When the Prophet ﷺ later told him some of his borrowed armour had been lost and asked whether he wished to be compensated, Safwan said no: what was in my heart that day is not in my heart today. He had come in as the man who swore to be the last holdout in all of Quraysh, and he left as a believer, generous now to every hungry soul who came to his door in Makkah or Madinah. Two of his sons, named Abdullah and Abd al-Rahman after the names the Prophet ﷺ loved most, would one day stand and die beside Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr at the Kaaba when nearly everyone else had fled.

These were the three men, Safwan among them, against whom the Prophet ﷺ had once prayed at Uhud. The scholars connected their case to the verse Allah sent down afterward:

Whether God relents towards them or punishes them is not for you [Prophet] to decide: they are wrongdoers.

QUR'AN 3:128

It was Allah's gentle correction: these men were not like the chiefs who died in one ditch at Badr. Something else was meant to come of them. Even the prayer of the Prophet ﷺ against them was answered with something better than what he had asked, because Allah saw, in hearts that looked like stone, something worth saving.

What these two lives ask of our faith

It is easy to read these two stories and feel only the drama of them, the poisoned sword and the recited secret, the four months and the three hundred camels. But these lives are not adventures to be admired from a distance. They are a question put directly to our own iman, and the question is this: do you actually believe that Allah can turn a heart?

Because we say we believe it, and then we quietly write people off. We look at someone far from the deen, or hostile to it, or sunk in a way of living that seems immovable, and our hearts conclude that this one is finished, this one will never change. Umayr ibn Wahb walked into the mosque to commit murder and walked out a believer in the space of one conversation. Safwan ibn Umayyah swore to be the last man in all of Arabia to ever submit, and submitted. The hand that turned them was not the sword of Umar at Umayr's neck; it was the Mercy of Allah, working through the

patience of a Prophet ﷺ who answered a poisoned plot with peace and an enemy's stubbornness with gift after gift. If your faith in Allah's power to guide does not include the people you have given up on, then it is smaller than these stories demand.

There is a second thing here, quieter and closer to home. Look at how the Prophet ﷺ treated Safwan, a man who had not yet believed, still negotiating, still hostile in his heart, fighting at Hunayn for convenience and not for faith. The Prophet ﷺ did not strike back, did not humiliate him, did not withhold from him to punish his arrogance. He kept giving, freely and patiently, until the giving itself broke the man open. This is how Allah deals with us, far more than we ever notice. How many of us were once cold to Him, going through the motions, demanding our terms, while He kept providing, kept covering our faults, kept holding the door open, until something in us finally softened and turned back. The generosity that conquered Safwan is the generosity your own Lord has been showing you all along.

So carry one concrete thing from these two cousins into your ordinary life, for the sake of Allah. Choose a person your heart has secretly decided is hopeless, a relative who prays for nothing, a friend who mocks the deen, the version of your own self you have stopped expecting to improve, and make a sincere dua for them tonight, trusting that the One who turned Umayr and Safwan can turn anyone. Then mirror, in some small way, the mercy that won them: answer a harshness with patience, a wrong with a gift, a cold heart with steady kindness, not to be praised for it, but because this is how Allah deals with His servants and how He asks His servants to deal with one another. Faith that truly trusts Allah's power does not give up on people, and faith that truly knows His mercy cannot help but extend a little of it.

May Allah be pleased with Umayr ibn Wahb and Safwan ibn Umayyah, who were brought from the very edge of murder into the light of His religion, and may He soften our hearts as He softened theirs, never let us write off a soul He has not written off, and make us, like them, instruments through which others find their way home to Him.

This chapter follows the account of Umayr ibn Wahb (RA) and Safwan ibn Umayyah (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (8:48, 3:128). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

The Children of Ta'if

The Hope of the Prophet ﷺ

Some of the people in this book are remembered for what they gave. These are remembered for what they took. They were the crowds of a city that turned the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ away on the worst day of his life. They lined the road and threw stones until his feet bled. They were the slaves and the street children who were set loose on a tired, grieving man who had come to them with nothing but the truth and a hope that they might listen. And yet, when the chance came to wipe them off the face of the earth in a single moment, the Prophet ﷺ refused, because of them. Not the adults who mocked him. Their children. He looked past the hatred in front of him and saw a future no one else could see, and he asked Allah to spare them all for the sake of a faith that had not yet been born in a single one of their hearts.

This is the chapter of the children of Ta'if (may Allah be pleased with those of them who believed), and it is, in the end, a chapter about hope.

The worst day

To understand the children, you have to stand where the Prophet ﷺ stood. He had gone to Ta'if after years of rejection in Makkah, after the deaths of the two people who had shielded him, looking for one tribe, one leader, one open door. He found none. The

chiefs of the city refused him, and then they did something crueller than refusal. They turned their young against him.

When the Prophet ﷺ left, they lined the path on both sides. The slaves and the children of Ta'if pelted him with stones until the blood ran down and filled his sandals, until he could barely stand. He was driven out of the city this way, hounded by mockery and the laughter of boys who had been told that this man was a fool worth hurting. He took shelter at last in a garden, broken and alone, and there he made the quiet, shattering supplication that has reached us across the centuries, complaining to Allah of his weakness, of his helplessness before people, and asking only that, if Allah was not angry with him, none of it would matter.

Years later, our mother Aisha asked him directly whether he had ever known a day worse than the day of Uhud, where he had been wounded and nearly killed. He answered, looking back across his whole life, that the worst of it was the day of Ta'if. He had gone to its people and they had not answered him as he had hoped. He departed in grief, his face heavy with it, and he did not find relief until he reached that garden. Of all the suffering this man endured, and he endured almost every kind, the day the children of Ta'if stoned him is the day he named as the hardest. Hold that in your mind, because it is the measure of everything that comes next.

The angel and the two mountains

As he sat in that garden, wounded and exhausted, he looked up and saw a cloud move to shade him. Out of it came the angel Jibril, who called to him and told him that Allah had heard exactly what his people had said to him and how they had answered him. And Allah had sent, along with Jibril, another angel: the angel of

the mountains, placed entirely at the Prophet's command, ready to do whatever he asked.

The angel of the mountains, whom the Prophet ﷺ had never met before, greeted him and then offered him the whole of Ta'if. If the Prophet ﷺ wished it, the angel would fold the two great mountains that stood on either side of the city together and crush every soul between them. It could all be over. These people had given him the worst day of his life. They had drawn his blood and laughed while they did it. He was, by every measure of justice the world has ever known, entirely within his right to say yes.

Consider, for a moment, what that offer truly was. There is a sacred saying that whoever shows enmity to a friend of Allah, Allah declares war on him. So what of the people who had just done this to the most beloved of all Allah's creation? The fire was already lit. The judgment was already justified. The angel was only waiting for a word.

The Prophet ﷺ said no.

And then he gave his reason, and the reason is the heart of this entire story. He said that he hoped Allah would bring forth from the loins of these people, from their children and their children's children, those who would worship Allah alone and associate nothing with Him. That was the answer. Spare them, because of what their descendants might one day become.

What the refusal reveals

Pause here, because it is easy to rush past this and call it mercy and move on. It is mercy, but it is something more precise than that, and the more precise thing is what should reach into your own heart.

Look at what the Prophet ﷺ did not say. He did not say, "Spare them, maybe their children will believe in me." He did not say, "Maybe their children will accept me, or love me, or finally give me the loyalty their parents withheld." He had every reason to want some vindication after a lifetime of rejection. He said none of it. He said: maybe their children will worship Allah and not associate any partner with Him.

This is one of the purest expressions of sincerity, of ikhlas, in the entire seerah. The wounds on his body were still fresh. This was piled on top of years of grief in Makkah. He was fully entitled to make this about himself, about his own pain, his own dignity, his own name. And he refused to make his mission about his feelings at all. His concern was not whether Muhammad ﷺ would be honored or shamed. His concern was whether Allah would be worshipped on this earth.

You see the same spirit later, on the eve of Badr, when he raised his hands and pleaded with his Lord. He did not pray that he himself be saved from humiliation. He prayed that if this small band of believers were destroyed, there would be no one left on earth to worship Allah. His fear was never for his own name. It was for the Name of Allah. That is the methodology he is teaching us through the garden of Ta'if: that a person can be dragged through the mud, can bleed in the dust, and still care for only one thing, that something good for Allah might grow from that very soil. If the price of that harvest is his own suffering, he is content to pay it.

The child who never forgot

So a question hangs over the scene. As the Prophet ﷺ stood there, reciting, leaning on a stick because he could barely hold himself up, did any of those children actually listen? When the

enslaved boys were ordered to throw their stones, did none of them look at this gentle, wounded man and wonder why they were doing this to him? The natural disposition Allah places in every child, the fitrah, does not learn cruelty on its own. Cruelty has to be taught. And something taught can sometimes be unlearned.

There is one narration that answers the question, and it is precious because it is the only direct witness we have from a child of that day. A man named Uthman ibn Abi al-As, who later became one of the noble companions, was asked by his son to tell the story of how he came to know the Prophet ﷺ. He said that he had been there, a young man, when the Prophet ﷺ came to Ta'if. And he said it was as if he could still see him: standing, leaning on something for support, reciting the Qur'an to the very end of a passage that struck the boy so deeply he never forgot a word of it.

He memorized it then, he said, in the days of ignorance, as a disbeliever. The recitation of the Prophet ﷺ in that desperate, lonely hour, with no people around him and only strangers and enemies before him, was so profound that it lodged in the heart of a child who had no intention of believing. And the persecutors knew the danger of it. After the stoning, they interrogated the young people: what did you hear from this man? Get it out of your minds. The leaders told them, we know our companion better than you do, and if he were truly what he claims, we would have followed him first, so forget whatever he said.

But you cannot take a thing out of a heart once Allah has placed it there. The words stayed. Years later, that same young man came to the Prophet ﷺ and accepted Islam, and he had the honor of reciting in faith the very passage he had memorized in

disbelief. He remembered it twice: once in the darkness, and once in the light. You never know who is listening. You never know whose heart is quietly keeping what you say.

The youngest of the delegation

The hope of the Prophet ﷺ was not disappointed. Years after the stoning, after the long siege of Ta'if during the campaign of Hunayn, a delegation came from that same city to Madinah, and they embraced Islam. They went home, and the people of Ta'if accepted Islam as a result. The city that had driven the Prophet ﷺ out with stones became a Muslim city. The supplication in the garden was being answered.

Among that delegation was its youngest member, the same Uthman ibn Abi al-As, the boy who had memorized the recitation. The scholars note that the eldest of the delegation was one of the chiefs who had once mocked the Prophet ﷺ. The youngest was this young man, described as a person of virtue, the trusted one. And there is evidence that he had quietly become Muslim even before that delegation arrived, hiding his faith from his own people so that he could go along with them and serve the cause from within. He came to the Prophet ﷺ already carrying some of the Qur'an, already knowing something of the religion, not one of the leaders who challenged the Prophet ﷺ on every point, but a young heart that had already turned.

The Prophet ﷺ was impressed by him, and he loved him. When the famous conversation with the delegation ended, the Prophet ﷺ appointed this youngest man as the leader of Ta'if, trusting his faith more than anyone else's. He had come as the youngest of the group. He left Madinah as their commander. The Prophet ﷺ is reported to have told the others, in effect, that this young man was something special, that they did not yet understand him, and

that they should take care of him and use him well. Abu Bakr and Umar remembered the love the Prophet ﷺ had carried for him. Under their leadership he became a governor and a fierce commander, one of the warriors who led expeditions against the Persian Empire, who later settled in Basra and taught and transmitted hadith there, planting the message in one of the great strongholds of Islamic history.

So watch the strange and beautiful arc of it. People who began by giving the Prophet ﷺ the worst day of his life ended by carrying his message to distant cities. The supplication of the garden, spare them, for their children might worship Allah, ran straight through a frightened boy with a stone in his hand and came out, years later, as a leader spreading the word of Allah across an empire.

The harvest we cannot see

We do not know what became of most of them. We do not know whose hands today are descended from those children, which scholars and narrators and quiet believers across the generations trace their blood to a boy who once stood on that road in Ta'if. With the exception of a handful, history does not record their names. Of the enslaved who were set on him, of the others in the crowd, the record is silent. But the silence is not emptiness. It is a harvest too vast to count.

There is a principle here worth carrying out of this chapter. When children are taught to hate, the hatred sits unnaturally on them, because it is against the fitrah Allah gave them. You may see a child groomed in something terrible, raised on hostility. And still there is hope, because beneath the grooming the natural disposition remains, and if it is nurtured rather than crushed, that child can be brought back. This is why the call to Allah must

continue even past the abrasive, hardened adults who reject it. The hope is in the future. The hope is always in the future. The Prophet ﷺ looked at a crowd that had bloodied him and saw not enemies to be destroyed but ancestors of believers yet to come.

What the children of Ta'if ask of our faith

It would be easy to read this as a story about patience under abuse, or about the high character of the Prophet ﷺ, and to admire it from a safe distance. But that is not what it is asking of you. It is asking about the object of your heart, the thing you are really living for.

The Prophet ﷺ refused vengeance not because he was incapable of anger, but because his mission was never about him. That is the question this chapter puts to your own iman: when you do good, when you give, when you serve, when you endure, who is it for? He could have made the call to Allah about his own dignity, and he refused. Most of us cannot give a small thing without wanting it noticed. Ask honestly how much of your worship, your charity, your patience is quietly bent toward the eyes of people, toward being thanked, toward being seen as good, and how much of it could be done the way he did it in that garden, with blood still on his feet, caring only that Allah be worshipped. That is ikhlas, and it is the difference between a deed that rises to Allah and a deed that dissolves into nothing. Take one act this week and strip it bare. Give something, forgive someone, pray something, and tell no one, and let it be for Allah alone.

And learn to see as he saw. He looked at the hardest hearts in front of him and refused to write off their children. There are people in your own life you have quietly given up on: the relative who will not listen, the friend who mocks what you believe, the

version of someone they have not yet become. The Prophet ﷺ teaches you to hold your hope past them and toward what Allah can still do. Allah brings the living out of the dead. He can place faith in a heart you have already buried, sometimes through a single word you said and forgot, that lodged in someone the way that recitation lodged in a frightened boy. So do not stop. Speak the good word. Plant it gently and leave the harvest to Allah, because you will never know who is listening, and you will never see most of what grows.

That is the deepest comfort in this story. The Prophet ﷺ never met most of those children as believers. He died the year after the delegation came. He scattered a hope he would not live to see fulfilled, and trusted Allah to bring it to fruit after he was gone. Your good is the same. What you do for Allah is not lost because you cannot see its end. He keeps it. He grows it in soil and seasons you will never witness. You are asked only to be faithful in the planting and content to leave the rest with the One who gave the children of Ta'if to faith.

May Allah be pleased with those of them who believed, and gather us among the hope of His Prophet ﷺ. May He make us of those who carry the call without needing to see its fruit, who do for His sake what no one will ever know, and who never give up on a heart while there is still breath in it. And may He give life to the dead hearts around us, and protect our own hearts from ever growing cold.

This chapter follows the account of the children of Ta'if in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The supplication of the Prophet ﷺ, the encounter with the angel of the mountains, and the narration of Uthman ibn Abi al-As are drawn from the hadith literature as related in that series. Where

the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abu Mahdhura

The Voice of Makkah

There is a kind of person we are quick to write off. The mocker. The boy at the edge of the crowd who laughs at what we hold sacred, who has clearly decided, before he knows anything at all, that he is against us. We see him and we think there is nothing there. The story of Abu Mahdhura (may Allah be pleased with him) begins exactly there, with a teenager laughing at the call to prayer, and it ends with that same boy's voice rising over Makkah five times a day for the rest of his life, his heart so full of love for the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that he would not so much as comb the hair the Prophet's hand had touched. Between the laugh and the love stood one short conversation. That is the whole story, and it is enough to change how you look at every difficult young person you will ever meet, and how you look at the difficult parts of your own heart.

A bunch of kids at the edge of the crowd

To understand the scene you have to understand where the Prophet ﷺ was. He had come a second time to the region of Ta'if and its surrounding tribes, the same region that had once driven him out with stones. This time he did not enter the city to be wounded again. He came, in a sense, to bring people out of it. Among those who left with him were twenty-three escaped slaves, and among those twenty-three was a young man whose first name the histories never settled on. Some say Samura, some

say Aws, some say Salama. What survived was not his name but his title: Abu Mahdhura. He came from that same area, a mix of Ta'if and Makkah in his roots.

The journey back toward Madinah was tense. These were the lands of bedouin tribes famous for the sudden ambush, the sneak attack out of the rocks, and at any moment one could come. The Prophet ﷺ was not only the Messenger of Allah on that road. He was a military commander, fully armored, leading a vulnerable group through hostile country. When the time for prayer came, he ordered the adhan to be called.

Nearby was a group of youth, a handful of boys, and they hated the Prophet ﷺ. It is worth pausing on why. They hated him the way children often hate, which is to say they had inherited it. Their parents hated him, so they hated him. They knew nothing of the message, nothing of the man. All they had ever heard was that this was the troublemaker from Makkah who had come once to cause problems and had now come back to cause more. So when the adhan began to ring out across that anxious camp, they did what bored, hostile teenagers do. From a safe distance, they began to mock it. Abu Mahdhura himself described it later. They started to make fun of the call, calling out the words in mockery, laughing, imitating the muadhin. You can picture them: ten-year-olds at the edge of the crowd, elbowing each other, throwing the sacred words back as a joke.

"Come here"

Then a voice cut through the mockery. In a stern tone the Prophet ﷺ said, "Come here."

And the laughter died. Because in that instant the boys remembered who they were dealing with. This was not only a

preacher they could heckle from afar. This was a general, armored, in the middle of a tense military movement, and he had heard them. This is the opposite of the story of another companion who pushed his own way forward toward the Prophet ﷺ out of love and eagerness. This was the dread of being caught. The boys came forward, all ten of them, terrified, with no idea what was about to happen to them.

The Prophet ﷺ told them to do again what they had been doing. Repeat the adhan. They looked around at one another. He said it again: go on. So they began, hesitant now, "Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar," with none of the mockery left in their voices, all of it drained out by fear, each of them wondering what he intended to do. The Prophet ﷺ listened. Then he asked which one of them had been the loudest in making fun of the call.

And here is a small, painfully human detail that Abu Mahdhura never forgot. They all pointed at him. Nine boys who had been laughing together a moment before, the instant fear arrived, turned as one and pointed at the tenth. It is a lesson about the company we keep. Friends who join you in the wrong thing will hand you over the moment there is a price to pay. Abu Mahdhura, singled out by his own companions, understood his situation at once: I am in trouble.

The Prophet ﷺ told the other nine they could go.

What a general does, and what the Prophet ﷺ did

Now imagine the scene as it must have felt to that boy. The nine are sent away. He alone is kept back, standing before an armored commander whom he has just been caught insulting, on a war footing, in enemy territory. Play it out the way the world plays it out. What does a military general do with the captured boy who

mocked him and his men? He makes an example of him. He executes him, or has him beaten, or takes him as a slave. The moment is heavy with that expectation. Everyone watching it would have braced for something terrible.

The Prophet ﷺ kept him close, and then drew closer to him, and said, "Say it again."

The boy, confused, said, "Say what?"

"Allahu akbar." The Prophet ﷺ was encouraging him, gently, to call out the adhan the way he had been mocking it, but now for real. So Abu Mahdhura began. He started low, and then, as the Prophet ﷺ kept drawing it out of him, his voice rose. And it became clear what was happening. The Prophet ﷺ was having him demonstrate his voice, because Abu Mahdhura had a beautiful voice, the voice of a singer, and the Prophet ﷺ had heard it inside the mockery and seen something in it that the boy himself did not know was there.

When he finished, the Prophet ﷺ handed him a small pouch with some silver in it, and smiled, and said, "This is a gift for you." The boy was stunned. A breath ago he had been certain he was about to be punished. Now there was silver in his hands and a smile turned toward him. Then the Prophet ﷺ placed his hand on the boy's forehead and made a quiet supplication for him. He moved his hand down and placed it over the boy's heart, over his chest, and prayed for him again, moving his blessed hand as Abu Mahdhura stood looking up at him. Part of the supplication was silent. Then aloud the Prophet ﷺ asked Allah to bless him, and to put blessing upon him.

Abu Mahdhura told the rest of it in words that anyone who loves the Prophet ﷺ will recognize. He said that the Prophet ﷺ had been, until that very moment, the most hated person in the world

to him. He had grown up hearing only ugly things, his reputation among them was horrible, and the boy had taken it all in. And then, in the span of one conversation, the most hated man in the world became the most beloved. Suddenly he was in awe of him. The hand on the forehead, the hand on the heart, the silver, the smile where there should have been a sword, all of it broke something open in him.

"Let me be the muadhin of Makkah"

So the boy asked the Prophet ﷺ to teach him the call again. And the Prophet ﷺ went through the whole adhan with him, word by word, making sure he had memorized it properly. Then, with the nerve that only a teenager could have, the same boy who minutes earlier had been mocking the call looked up and said, "O Messenger of Allah, let me be the muadhin of Makkah."

Think of the audacity of it. A minute ago you were laughing at my muadhin. You are lucky I spared you. I gave you money, I prayed for you, your heart has only just filled with love for Allah, and you have not yet prayed a single prayer, and already you are asking to be the muadhin of the holy city. And the Prophet ﷺ said, simply, yes. He told him that he would send for him to take up that position. Makkah had only just been conquered. The Prophet ﷺ had left a commander there. And now, on this road, he appointed this boy to give the call to prayer at the most sacred place on earth. In one moment he was mocking the adhan. In the next he was being sent to carry it for the city of Makkah. There is hardly a turn in any life more profound than that.

So Abu Mahdhura went to Makkah, and his voice did exactly what the Prophet ﷺ had heard in it on that anxious road. People loved to hear him call the adhan. His voice was so beautiful, so full of feeling, that the people of Makkah would ask him to repeat

it. He had been given the voice of a singer, and he turned the whole of it toward Allah. He became the muadhin appointed by the Prophet ﷺ himself, and for as long as the Prophet ﷺ lived, Abu Mahdhura would not give up his position. He guarded it jealously. No one else called the adhan in Makkah but him, partly out of love for it and partly out of fear that someone might take from him this thing the Prophet ﷺ had given him with his own hands. And his voice was beautiful enough that the people were content to let it be his.

The hair he would never cut

There is a detail in his life that says more about love than a hundred sermons could. The Prophet ﷺ, when he made that supplication, had touched a part of Abu Mahdhura's head. From that day, Abu Mahdhura would not cut that part of his hair, and he would not even part it. He trimmed everywhere else. He kept himself as a man keeps himself. But that one place, where the hand of the Prophet ﷺ had rested while he prayed for him, he left untouched for the rest of his life. The Prophet ﷺ made supplication for me here, he would say, and he touched this, and so I will never cut it, never part it. He carried the memory of that moment physically on his own head until he died.

He went on to become a narrator of hadith, with students who reported from him. And there is something quietly beautiful about what he narrated. All eight of his reports are about the adhan. Nothing else. As if to say: I am a muadhin, I know the call to prayer, the Prophet ﷺ appointed me to this one thing and I have owned it completely. He did not scatter himself. He guarded his task. The form of the call he taught, with its words repeated in the fuller pattern, became known and passed down, and it is one of the recognized ways of giving the adhan that scholars trace,

through this very man, back to what the Prophet ﷺ taught him on the road that day.

And the gift did not end with him. Just as the Prophet ﷺ had said the key of the Kaaba must remain in the family entrusted with it, so the call of Makkah remained with the children of Abu Mahdhura: his sons, his grandsons, his great-grandsons, generation after generation, only his descendants giving the adhan of the holy city long after he was gone. He lived a long life, and he held that position fiercely to the end. There is even a report that when a later authority tried to send another man to give the call in Makkah, the aging Abu Mahdhura would not have it, and pushed the would-be replacement back toward the well of Zamzam, refusing to let anyone come between him and the reward the Prophet ﷺ had placed in his hands. It is half stubbornness and half devotion, and it tells you how much that one conversation on the road had come to mean to him. He even put it into verse, swearing by the Lord, and by Muhammad ﷺ, and by what he recited of the Qur'an, and by the adhan itself, that he would guard what was his. The boy who once mocked the call spent the rest of his days unable to imagine letting it go.

What Abu Mahdhura's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read this story as a lesson about handling young people well, and it is that. The Prophet ﷺ saw potential in someone who showed no willingness whatsoever to be guided, who was in fact actively mocking him, and instead of crushing the boy, he found the one good thing in him, that voice, and built a whole life on it. He did not break a young person who was showing him great promise behind the insolence. That alone could reshape how a parent, a teacher, an older sibling speaks to

the difficult child in front of them. But if we stop there, we have taken the smaller lesson and left the greater one.

The greater lesson is what it tells us about the mercy of Allah, and what it asks of our hope in Him. Abu Mahdhura was, by his own honest account, full of hatred. He had inherited it, nursed it, and acted on it. By the world's measure he was exactly the kind of person we give up on, the one whose heart seems already decided against the truth. And Allah turned that heart completely, through His Prophet ﷺ, in the space of a single short exchange. Hatred to love. Mockery to lifelong service. If you have ever looked at someone, a child, a relative, a stranger, perhaps even yourself, and thought there is no hope for this heart, the life of Abu Mahdhura is Allah's answer. No heart is beyond the reach of the One who made it. Your part is not to write people off. Your part is to do the small good thing, the kind word, the gentle hand, and to leave the turning of hearts to the One who turns them. So make this concrete today: think of the one person you have already decided is a lost cause, and instead of confirming your judgment of them, do them a single quiet kindness for the sake of Allah, and let Allah do the rest.

There is a second thing here, for your own heart, and it is about what you do with the one gift He has given you. Abu Mahdhura had a beautiful voice. He had been using it to mock the call to prayer. The moment his heart changed, he turned that very voice entirely toward Allah, not toward fame, though people loved to hear him, but toward the sake of Allah alone. That is sincerity, and it is the question this story puts to you. You have been given something, a voice, a skill, a strength, a way with people, a trade. The world will tell you a hundred ways to spend it on yourself. Abu Mahdhura took the one thing he was good at and made it an act of worship, repeated five times a day, every day, for the rest

of his life, until it was the whole shape of who he was. Ask what your one gift is, and ask honestly whether it is serving you or serving Allah, and then bend it, even a little, back toward Him.

And there is the matter of the hair he would never cut, which is really a lesson about cherishing what is sacred. He held on to the memory of one blessed moment so tenderly that he carried it on his own body for life, and he guarded the task he had been given so fiercely that he would not let it slip from his hands. We are forgetful people. We taste a moment of nearness to Allah in prayer, in Ramadan, in a night of standing, and within days we let it go as though it never happened. Abu Mahdhura refused to let go. Whatever Allah has placed in your hands of worship and nearness, hold it the way he held the adhan: as a gift too precious to surrender, too precious even to neglect.

The boy at the edge of the crowd became the voice of the holy city, and his children's children carried that voice for generations, all because the most beloved of creation refused to see him as the world saw him. May Allah be pleased with Abu Mahdhura, the muadhin of Makkah. May He soften our hearts toward the ones we have given up on, turn the gifts He has given us back toward Him, and never let us let go of what little nearness to Him we have been granted.

This chapter follows the account of Abu Mahdhura (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Where the histories carry more than one narration, including the differing reports of his given name, the most widely reported has been

followed. No Qur'anic verse is quoted, as none is cited verbatim in the source.

Abu Bakra

The Freed Slave of Allah

There is a man whose name you have almost certainly read without knowing it was his. You were turning the pages of Bukhari or Muslim, and your eye passed over the words "Abu Bakra," and some part of you assumed it was simply Abu Bakr, the great companion, with a stray letter no one had bothered to correct. It was not a slip. It was a different man entirely, a man whose whole life is folded into that one strange, easily missed name. And the story of how he came by it is one of the most vivid scenes in all the seerah: a man throwing himself off the wall of a besieged fortress, clinging to the wooden wheel of a well, descending on the rope into the camp of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to make himself free.

To understand him, you have to begin where he began, which was at the very bottom of the world he was born into.

A man with no place to stand

He was an enslaved man in the city of Ta'if. To grasp what that meant, you have to remember what Ta'if had been to the Prophet ﷺ. It was the city that had received him with stones, that had set its children and its slaves on him to drive him out bleeding from its streets. If that was how the people of Ta'if treated a guest, a man of noble lineage who had come to them with mercy, you can imagine what they were to those they owned. Abu Bakra came

out of the harshest layer of one of the harshest societies of the age.

His given name was not Abu Bakra at all. The histories record it as something closer to Nufay'. His mother was an Abyssinian woman named Sumayyah, and his father, the histories say, was a man named Masruh, himself enslaved. But the people of Ta'if did not call him by his father's name. They attached him instead to his master, al-Harith, and the rumor they spread was that he was al-Harith's own son. He hated that. He spent his life refusing it. There was a wound in it, the wound of a man told that even his parentage belonged to someone else, that he was not entitled to his own father.

This is the man Allah was about to lift out of the dust.

The wheel of the well

Eight years after the Hijra, the Prophet ﷺ had returned in strength to the region he had once left in pain. Makkah had opened to him. The tribes that had gathered against him had been beaten back, and a remnant of them had fled into Ta'if and shut its gates. The Prophet ﷺ laid the city under siege. Ta'if is built into the mountains, not on a plain, and to assault it directly was a hard and costly thing. So the Prophet ﷺ made a decision that tells you everything about the mercy in him. Even now, with the city that had stoned him within his reach, he did not pray for its destruction. When he had been asked, years before, to call down ruin upon Ta'if, he had refused, because he still believed something good would come out of it. He believed it still.

So instead of pressing the siege to its bitter end, he chose to withdraw toward Madinah. But before he left, he made an announcement that carried more in it than its few words could

hold. He called out that whoever came down out of the forts of Ta'if was free.

Think about what that meant to a man who owned nothing, not even his own name. For most of the people inside, freedom meant slipping out of a city under siege. For an enslaved man, it meant everything at once: freedom from the chains of his master, and, if he chose it, freedom from the idols his masters worshipped. Around twenty-three enslaved people seized that single opening and ran for it.

One of them was the man we are following. The narrations preserve the detail, and it is unforgettable. To get over the wall, he took hold of the bakra, the wooden pulley-wheel that turns above a well to draw the water up, and used it to lower himself down the outside of the fortress, hanging on the rope, dropping into the open ground below and running to the Prophet ﷺ. He arrived in the camp of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ with nothing in his hands but the memory of that escape. From that day, for the rest of his life, across more than half a century, he was called Abu Bakra, the father of the wheel. A man's whole identity, reset around the single moment he chose Allah over bondage.

"He is the freed slave of Allah"

The story has a turn in it that you do not see coming. Some time after this, the people of Ta'if accepted Islam, and a delegation came to the Prophet ﷺ. Among the matters they raised was this: the master, al-Harith, wanted his slave back. By the customs of men, he had a claim. The man had been his property; the war was over; surely the property should return.

The Prophet ﷺ gave an answer that lifted Abu Bakra out of one world and set him forever in another. He said no. He said that this

man was the freed slave of Allah and the freed slave of His Messenger. There was no higher title to give a human being. He had not merely changed owners. He had been taken out of the category of things that can be owned and placed among the people of Allah. The master had no right to him, because he was now one of the believers, and a believer cannot be carried back into chains.

Consider what was said there. A man who had been told all his life that he did not even own his own lineage was now told, by the mouth of the Prophet ﷺ, that he belonged to Allah and to no one else. The wound that Ta'if had cut into him, the lie that he was the property and the son of a man he despised, was answered not by giving him a better human master, but by removing the question of ownership from him entirely. His grandest description, his real lineage, was this: the freed slave of Allah.

And so when people insisted on attaching him to someone, he had his answer ready. If you ask me my name, he would say, I am Abu Bakra, freed by the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, who freed not only my body but my soul from idolatry. And if you must attribute me to a father, say I am the son of Masruh, the enslaved man, my true father. He would not be called the son of al-Harith. He wore the name the Prophet ﷺ had given him, the freed slave of Allah, as the proudest thing he had, because it tied his whole journey back to his Lord.

Brought all the way in

Here is the quiet miracle of what happened next, and it is the part most worth slowing down for. A man like this could so easily have been kept at the edges. He was not from Makkah, not from Madinah, and had no noble lineage anyone wanted to claim. He came from the slave class of a city that the believers had every

reason to resent. By every measure the old world used, he should have lived out his days on the margins of the new community, tolerated, fed, but never truly inside.

That is not what happened. Abu Bakra was not distanced. He was brought all the way in. The Prophet ﷺ took notice of him at once, the way a gardener notices the first fruit on a young tree. He became a full member of the society of Madinah, not a charity case at its edge but a man at its center. The proof of it is written into the books we still read today: Abu Bakra narrates 132 hadith directly from the Prophet ﷺ. You do not gather that many narrations from a man you keep at arm's length. You gather them by being near him, again and again, by being trusted, by being present in the room. In a handful of years, a runaway slave from Ta'if became one of the carriers of the words of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ to the rest of time.

This is what the religion did to the categories of the world. It did not merely improve a man's standing. It dissolved the bars of the cage and seated him among the people who would teach the ummah its faith.

A man of great enthusiasm

The Prophet ﷺ saw in Abu Bakra a particular quality, and it is one worth dwelling on, because it shows us not only the man but the heart of the one who taught him. Abu Bakra was a man of great zeal. He had come out of a brutal life into the light of Islam, and he wanted all of it at once. That kind of eagerness is precious, but it is also clumsy. The eager make mistakes. They run ahead.

There is an incident, and Abu Bakra is the one who tells it on himself, which is the first beautiful thing about it. He came into

the mosque while the Prophet ﷺ was already bowing in prayer. Afraid of missing the bowing, the ruku', he bowed right there, near the door, before he had even reached the rows, and then walked forward in that bent posture until he joined the line. Picture it. A grown man, doubled over, shuffling through the back of the mosque so as not to lose a single moment of the prayer.

Now imagine how most of us would react to a new Muslim doing something like that. We would correct him sharply. We would ask him what on earth he thought he was doing, embarrass him, make him feel foolish. The Prophet ﷺ did the opposite, and the order of his words is the whole lesson. The first thing out of his mouth was not the correction. It was, "May Allah increase you in eagerness." He blessed the impulse first. Only then did he add, gently, "but do not do it again." He understood that the mistake came from a good place, from a heart racing toward worship, and he refused to crush that heart in the name of fixing the error.

There is a distinction the scholars draw, and the Prophet ﷺ embodied it perfectly: the difference between a person who errs out of good intention and a person who errs out of malice or greed. To treat those two the same is an injustice that can break a soul. Go straight to the harsh correction with someone who only wanted to do good, and you risk turning him away from Allah altogether. Begin with encouragement, affirm the sincerity, and then correct, and you keep the heart intact. Abu Bakra walked away from that moment not humiliated but honored. The Prophet ﷺ had made a supplication for him. What could have been a memory of shame became a memory of love, which is exactly why Abu Bakra was the one who told the story.

The trusts he carried

Because Abu Bakra was brought close, and because he listened, the ummah received through him some of its most formative teachings. This is the deeper fruit of the whole episode. Had the Prophet ﷺ destroyed Ta'if in his anger, this channel would have been sealed before it opened. Instead, it flowed.

It was Abu Bakra who narrated the hadith of the eclipse prayer, the salat al-kusuf. When the sun was darkened, the Prophet ﷺ taught that this was not an omen tied to the death or birth of any person, as the people imagined, but a sign by which Allah puts fear into the hearts of His servants and calls them back to Himself. Through Abu Bakra, that turning of the heart toward Allah at every eclipse comes down to us.

It was Abu Bakra who carried the warning about false testimony. The Prophet ﷺ asked his companions, three times, "Shall I not tell you of the worst of the major sins?" He named associating partners with Allah, and disobedience to parents. Then he, who had been reclining, sat up and began to repeat, "and false testimony, and false speech," and kept repeating it until they wished, out of concern for him, that he would stop. A man who had spent his life having his own parentage falsely declared by others understood in his bones why bearing false witness sits among the gravest of sins. He held that teaching as something precious, and it fit everything he had lived.

He narrated, too, the tenderness of the Prophet ﷺ in the night, recalling how the Messenger of Allah ﷺ did not pass a single sleeping person without calling him to prayer or gently shaking him by the foot to wake him. And he carried rulings that would steady the community for generations, among them the prohibition of exchanging gold for gold and silver for silver except

in equal measure, a principle at the root of how Muslims understand fair dealing.

There is one more thing that the carrying of all these narrations did for Abu Bakra himself. Because he had received so many of the Prophet's words about discord and bloodshed between believers, he kept himself clear of the great civil strife, the fitna, that later tore through the ummah. He did not take part in it, and he counseled others to stay out of it. The man who had once run toward every good deed now knew, from the mouth of the Prophet ﷺ, when the safest ground was to step back.

A house full of scholars, and a dignified end

Watch what Islam did to a single family across a single lifetime. Abu Bakra, the runaway slave with no lineage anyone would claim, became the father of scholars. His sons and a daughter became narrators of hadith. He settled in Basra, the great city that grew out of this same era, and there he taught for the better part of five decades, a living link back to the Prophet ﷺ, with the greatest minds of the next generation sitting before him. One son became a governor in Persia, and Abu Bakra wrote to him a line he had heard from the Prophet ﷺ: let none of you judge between two people while he is angry. The grandson of an enslaved Abyssinian woman was now instructing rulers in justice. Of Basra it was said by a great imam of the following generation that no two greater people came to that city than Abu Bakra and Hussein. The disparities of race and tribe and wealth that the old world treated as permanent had simply been dissolved.

His death was as humble and as full of faith as his life. In his old age, one of his wives passed away, and he insisted on leading her funeral prayer and entering the grave himself, as was his right as a companion of the Prophet ﷺ. As the people crowded in

during the burial, he was crushed in the press of the grave, and at his age the injury was more than his body could carry. He was taken back to his family, where around twenty of his children and grandchildren gathered, weeping over him.

He told them not to weep. He swore by Allah that there was no soul he would rather see leave its body than his own. They were astonished and asked him why. He said that he saw a time coming, a time of fitna, in which he would no longer be able to enjoin good or forbid evil, and there was no good for him in such a day. He was content, he said, that Allah was taking his life now, before he could be dragged into that trial. This was the prayer the Prophet ﷺ himself had taught, to be taken without being tested beyond one's strength. When his children spoke of bringing a physician, he answered with the clear eyes of a man who had long ago put his trust in his Lord: where is your doctor, let him push away death if he is truthful. He knew that when Allah has decreed the hour, no hand holds it back. He passed away in Basra around the year 52 after the Hijra.

There is one last grace in his story, and it closes the circle. When the Prophet ﷺ had received him in Madinah, he had given him a brother in faith, in the way he bonded the emigrants and the helpers. That brother had taken him into his own home. And Abu Bakra left it in his will that this same brother should lead his funeral prayer. So the man who had first welcomed the runaway slave into his house in Madinah was the one who prayed over his body in Basra, four and a half decades later. The bond Islam had built between two strangers held all the way to the grave.

What Abu Bakra's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a story like this and feel only the drama of it, the man on the rope, the wheel of the well, and to leave it there, a

fine tale. That would be to miss what it is asking of us. Abu Bakra's life is not a thrilling escape to admire from a distance. It is a question put directly to our own iman.

The first thing it asks is whether we will run toward Allah the way he ran toward that wall. He did not wait for the perfect moment, for a guarantee, for someone to make it safe. He heard that whoever came out was free, and he threw himself off a fortress on a wooden wheel because something in him chose Allah over everything he knew. Most of us are not enslaved in any city, yet we are held by quieter chains: habits we will not break, sins we keep returning to, a faith we keep at the edge of our lives because committing fully feels like too much to risk. His life asks: what is the wall you have been refusing to climb, and what is keeping you on the wrong side of it? Freedom, real freedom, came to him the moment he chose his Lord. It is offered to you on the same terms.

The second thing it asks is about the eagerness the Prophet ﷺ blessed in him. We live in an age that is fluent in correction and clumsy with encouragement. When we see someone new to the deen stumble, someone praying wrong, dressing wrong, asking a question that reveals how little they know, our first instinct is too often the sharp word that drives them away. Abu Bakra received a supplication before he received a correction, and it turned a moment of error into a lifetime of love. Carry that with you. When you meet someone trying, sincerely, to do good for the sake of Allah and getting it wrong, let your first words affirm the heart, and let the correction come gently and second. You may be standing, in that moment, between a soul and its Lord. Do not crush what Allah is growing.

And the third thing, the deepest, is what his whole life proves about the promise of Allah. The world had assigned this man a place at the very bottom and told him he did not even own his own name. Allah lifted him out of it, named him through His Prophet ﷺ the freed slave of Allah, seated him among the carriers of revelation, filled his house with scholars, and let him teach kings. None of that came from lineage or wealth, because he had neither. It came from the single moment he turned toward his Lord, and the years of sincerity that followed. This is the promise that should reorder how you see your own life: it does not matter where the world has placed you, what you were born into, what label has been stuck to you. The One who freed Abu Bakra is your Lord too, and He raises whom He wills by faith alone. What you give Him, He keeps. What you turn toward Him with, He honors.

So take one thing from Abu Bakra into your ordinary week. Break one chain you have told yourself is simply who you are, and run from it toward Allah the way he ran. Speak one word of encouragement to someone struggling toward the deen before you offer them a single correction. And when hardship presses in on you, meet it the way he met death, content with the decree of your Lord, trusting that He who has counted your days has also counted your reward. May Allah be pleased with Abu Bakra, the freed slave of Allah, free our hearts from every bondage but His, and gather us among those He has lifted by their faith.

This chapter follows the account of Abu Bakra (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). It draws only on what that lecture relates; the lecture cites the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ rather than specific Qur'anic verses, and so none are

quoted here. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

The Jinn Who Became Muslim

The Unseen Delegation

There is a moment in the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ when he was, by every human measure, completely alone. He had walked roughly seventy miles to the city of Ta'if carrying the hope that a new people might shelter the message that Makkah had refused. They did worse than refuse. They set their children and their slaves on him, lined the road, and stoned him until the blood ran into his shoes. He left that city broken in body and heart, and he turned back toward a home that had already rejected him. No human being on that road had answered his call. Not one.

And it was precisely there, in the emptiness of that journey, that Allah sent him a delegation no eye in Makkah could see. They were not from his tribe. They were not even from his kind. They were a group of the jinn, and they came not to harm him but to listen, and having listened, to believe. They are the firsts of the jinn, the first of an entire unseen creation to answer the call of Islam, and their story is one of the most quietly consoling passages in the whole Qur'an.

A creation we cannot see

Before we can sit with what happened on that road, we have to know who came. The Qur'an speaks plainly of a creation made before us and beside us, fashioned from fire as we were

fashioned from clay, living in the same world but hidden from our eyes. They see us; we do not see them. And among them, exactly as among us, there are the righteous and the corrupt. There are jinn who rebel, and there are jinn who believe.

This is worth pausing on, because the word "jinn" often calls to mind only mischief and harm. The Qur'an corrects that. There are believers among them. In the chapter named ar-Rahman, the Most Merciful turns to both creations together, the seen and the unseen, and addresses them as one audience:

Which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?

QUR'AN 55:13

The Prophet ﷺ explained that when this verse was recited, the believing jinn answered better than we did. They said, in effect, "None of Your favors, our Lord, do we deny." Two creations, one Lord, one accountability. The jinn hear our language. They understood the prophets sent to humankind. They were answerable to those messengers just as we are, and they are answerable to the final Messenger, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who is the seal of prophethood for every creature that bears a duty before Allah.

The scholars settled a few things clearly here. No jinn was ever sent as a prophet to human beings, because Allah sends messengers in the language and form of the people they are sent to, and we are taught by our own kind. Every prophet sent to humanity was a prophet to the jinn as well. And after the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ there is no prophet at all, for any creation. So when the jinn embraced this message, they were not following a separate religion. They were entering the same faith, through the same Messenger, as everyone else.

The night the heavens changed

The histories tell us that as the Prophet ﷺ made his way back from Ta'if, he stopped to rest at a place called Nakhlah, a small stretch of ground between Ta'if and Makkah where travellers paused for shade and water. It is the kind of quiet, half-abandoned place the jinn are said to frequent. There, in the depth of the night, the Prophet ﷺ stood in prayer and recited the Qur'an aloud.

Something had shifted in the unseen world around this time. With the coming of the revelation, the heavens had been guarded in a new way, and the devils who once climbed up to snatch fragments of news from beyond this realm were now driven back. The jinn felt it. They knew that something enormous had entered the world, and they began to search for it, exactly as some human beings were searching, some sincerely seeking the truth and some only wanting to interrupt it before it could spread.

And then, in the stillness of Nakhlah, a group of them heard a sound they did not expect: a man reciting words unlike any words they knew. The Qur'an describes the scene with startling intimacy. They crowded in close to listen. They hushed one another. Be quiet, they said, so that not a syllable would be lost. The verse that records this also tells us something the Prophet ﷺ himself did not know in the moment. He was reciting into what seemed an empty night, and an entire delegation was leaning in over one another to drink it in.

There is a detail the narrations preserve that deepens this. These jinn are said to have come from the region of Nasibin, a place that had been a centre of religious scholarship, of reverence for the earlier scriptures of Moses and Jesus, peace be upon them. It is among the lands a sincere seeker had once travelled in search of

pure monotheism. So the very place that had nurtured longing for the one God now sent a group of its unseen inhabitants to the man who carried the final word of that one God. Hearts that had been prepared by older light recognised the new light at once.

What they carried back to their people

When the recitation finished, they did not linger to argue or to test him. They turned, and they went home, and they became callers themselves. The Qur'an gives us their words almost as a sermon, the first sermon ever preached by the jinn to the jinn:

We sent a group of jinn to you [Prophet] to listen to the Quran. When they heard it, they said to one another, 'Be quiet!' Then when it was finished they turned to their community and gave them warning. They said, 'Our people, we have been listening to a Scripture that came after Moses, confirming previous scriptures, giving guidance to the truth and the straight path. Our people, respond to the one who calls you to God. Believe in Him: He will forgive you your sins and protect you from a painful torment.' Those who fail to respond to God's call cannot escape God's power anywhere on earth, nor will they have any protector against Him: such people have clearly gone far astray.

QUR'AN 46:29-32

Read those words slowly, because they carry the whole shape of faith inside them. They recognised that this Scripture confirmed what came before, that it did not cancel the truth of Moses but completed it. They named its purpose: guidance to the truth, guidance to the straight path. They issued the same invitation every prophet had issued, respond to the One who calls you. They promised what Allah promises, forgiveness of sins and protection from punishment. And they warned, soberly, that there

is no escaping Allah and no protector beside Him. These newly believing jinn had grasped, in a single night of listening, the things that some human beings spend a lifetime resisting.

The histories suggest that this first encounter was a recitation overheard, not yet a face-to-face meeting. The jinn listened, believed, and returned to their people. Only afterward did Allah appoint a time for the Prophet ﷺ to meet a delegation of them directly and teach them. The companions remembered this as the Night of the Jinn. One of them was asked, "Were you there on the night of the jinn?" and he answered that he was, and that he had been among the closest to the Prophet ﷺ through the whole of it.

His account is vivid in its human ordinariness. The Prophet ﷺ had simply vanished. The companions could not find him anywhere, and a quiet panic moved through them as they searched. When he finally returned, they pressed him, and he told them what had happened: a group of the jinn had come to ask him about Islam, to ask him about this message, and he had recited the Qur'an to them and taught them its rulings. They were a creation built differently from us, with their own circumstances, so the Prophet ﷺ was given guidance for some of their particular questions. There were jinn among them who had been Christians, jinn who had been Jews, jinn who had been idolaters, and now all of them were being folded into the one faith.

The valley near Makkah

If you go to Makkah today there is a place known as Masjid al-Jinn, the mosque of the jinn, marking the area where this meeting is remembered to have taken place. There is a tenderness in its location that is easy to miss. It sits near where the Prophet's own beloved family members are buried, in the quarter of the

cemetery, and the histories note that the jinn, like the seekers among us, are drawn to such still and solemn ground.

So picture it. Not far from the resting place of those the Prophet ﷺ had loved and buried, in the hush of a Makkan night, a conversation unfolded between the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and a delegation from a creation no one around him could see, a creation that had come, of its own longing, to believe. One companion who walked with the Prophet ﷺ to one of these gatherings described actually witnessing a manifestation of them as the Prophet ﷺ taught them the Book of Allah and its rulings. Years later, far away in Iraq, he said he once saw a group of jinn that resembled the very ones who had met the Prophet ﷺ, as if the line had continued.

And in a sense it had. These first believing jinn became the seed of something that did not stop. Just as the human companions carried the message outward into the world, this unseen delegation became the basis for callers among the jinn who would carry the Prophet's message to their own kind across the earth. How many of them believed that first season, the histories cannot agree. Seventy, some say. Some say seven hundred. Some say more than a thousand. The number does not matter. What matters is that on the loneliest night of his mission, the Prophet ﷺ had been answered, abundantly, by ears he never knew were listening.

Seeds you cannot see

This is why Allah told him. Think about the timing. The revelation that records the jinn was sent down in the bruised aftermath of Ta'if, and it was, at its heart, a consolation. It is as if Allah were saying to His Messenger: you saw a road of people who would not listen, but I had others listening whom you could not see. You

felt your work fall flat against the stones of Ta'if, but it did not fall flat at all.

There is a striking pattern around this period of the Prophet's life, and the scholars have drawn it out. After the human elites of Ta'if rejected him in the cruelest way, he was taken up through the heavens on the Night Journey and greeted there by the most elevated of all creation, the prophets of Allah, one after another. After the cruelty of human beings, the angels welcomed him. And after the refusal of one city of people, Allah sent him the first delegation of an entire unseen creation to embrace his call. Where one door slammed, Allah was quietly opening others on every side, in the heavens and in the unseen, in places the Prophet ﷺ could not have reached on his own.

The same Surah that tells of the jinn also recalls older prophets who warned their people from the hills and were rejected and whose nations were then destroyed. Their warnings seemed, in their own day, to fail. Yet those very stories became lessons that outlived them, carried forward to teach later generations, including ours. The point is gentle and enormous: you do not get to see the full reach of your good. A word of truth may land in a heart you will never meet again, and bear fruit long after you are gone. The seed and the harvest are not always granted to the same hands.

What the unseen delegation asks of our faith

It is easy to treat this story as a curiosity, a strange and interesting footnote about an unseen creation. That would be to miss the comfort Allah folded into it for people exactly like us.

The first thing it asks of us is that we trust Allah's promise when the results are invisible. The Prophet ﷺ left Ta'if convinced, by

every visible sign, that he had achieved nothing. He had not. There was a whole congregation listening in the dark. How often do we measure our worth before Allah by what we can see: the people who thanked us, the change we can point to, the visible proof that our effort mattered? This story tells you that your sight is not the measure. You may stand for what is right and lose your position and watch no one take your side. You may say a kind, true word to a stranger and never learn that it turned their whole life toward Allah years later. The believer's task is to do the good and entrust the harvest to the One who sees the unseen. Plant the seed, and leave the growing to Allah.

The second thing it asks is sincerity. These jinn heard the truth and acted on it immediately, with no audience to impress, no crowd to perform for, no record of their names for us to praise. They simply believed and then went home and called their own people to Allah. That is ikhlas: to respond to Allah because He is owed the response, not because anyone is watching. Ask yourself how much of your faith depends on being seen, and whether you could do for Allah alone the things you now do partly for people. The unseen who believed in secret are a quiet rebuke to all our public piety, and a quiet invitation to something purer.

The third thing it asks is that we keep calling people to good even when the calling seems to fail. The Prophet ﷺ was stoned out of Ta'if and answered by the jinn. The prophets warned from the hills and were rejected, and their warnings became guidance for nations not yet born. So do not let a cold response, a closed door, a mocking face, persuade you that goodness is wasted. It is never wasted. Speak the truth gently, live it visibly, carry the message as far as your own strength reaches, and trust that Allah

commands the rest of its journey. He has ears listening that you will never know about.

And the deepest thing this story asks is that we hold fast to hope in Allah at the very moment despair feels reasonable. The road from Ta'if was, on its surface, a disaster. Underneath that surface, Allah was lifting His Messenger through the heavens, sending him the greetings of the prophets, and gathering for him the first believers of an unseen world. What looked like the lowest point was, in Allah's hands, the threshold of mercy upon mercy. Remember that when your own road seems to lead nowhere. With hardship Allah pairs ease. With rejection He can send a help you never imagined and could never have arranged.

So take one thing from this unseen delegation into your ordinary days. Do one good deed this week that no one will ever see, purely because Allah will see it. Say one word of truth or kindness without needing to watch where it lands. And when your effort for Allah seems to fall on deaf ears, refuse the lie that it was wasted, and hand the outcome back to the One who answered His Prophet ﷺ from the silence of the night. May Allah be pleased with the first believers of the jinn, make us among those who plant good without needing to see it grow, and let no sincere thing we ever do for His sake be lost.

This chapter follows Dr. Omar Suleiman's account of the believing jinn in his series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (55:13, 46:29-32). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Addas of Ta'if

The Brother of Yunus

There is a man in the story of Islam about whom we know almost nothing. We do not know his family name, or who his parents were, or whether he ever married, or where he was buried, or what became of him after a single afternoon in a garden. He was a slave, owned by other men, counted by the world as nothing. And yet of all the people Allah could have chosen to be the first soul to embrace the message of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the lands beyond Makkah, He chose this man, this stranger from a distant country, dragged across the world in chains, set down at the edge of a vineyard at the exact moment the Prophet ﷺ needed him most.

His name was Addas (may Allah be pleased with him), and his whole share of the story is one conversation. But that conversation is one of the most quietly devastating moments in the entire seerah, and to understand it you have to walk first into the worst day of a Prophet's life.

The city that should have said yes

Ta'if is not like the rest of Arabia. If you go there even now, you wonder what you are looking at. It sits up in the mountains, green where the land around it is bare, with trees and flowing water and seasons that actually change, a winter and a summer, instead of the unbroken heat of Makkah. It grows fruit of every kind and

flowers of every kind. To this day it is one of the great rose-growing places of the world, and the famous rose-scented perfume you read about in the descriptions of the Prophet ﷺ comes from there. Its raisins were said to be as large as its dates. And the scholars say that almost no fruit reached Makkah except from Ta'if.

So Ta'if was the orchard of the region, the food and the fragrance of it, and its people were its elites: rich, comfortable, refined, sure of themselves. Their great idol, al-Lat, was a huge thing, decked in jewelry and rubies and pearls, and even that idol, when it was later destroyed, held enough wealth to pay off the debts of a man. Ta'if was a city that mattered.

That is why, when the Prophet ﷺ reached the lowest point of his life, his heart turned to it. This was the year his beloved wife Khadijah (RA) had died, and his uncle and protector Abu Talib had died, the year the books call the Year of Sorrow. Makkah had become unbearable. And the Prophet ﷺ, who was wise enough to plan before he travelled, believed he had reason to hope in Ta'if. He had relatives by marriage there. He went carrying not even a demand, only a request: that the three chiefs of the city, the sons of Amr ibn Umayr, accept his call to the worship of the One God, or if not that, then at least grant him refuge, a safe place to gather his strength and let the rest of the Qur'an descend. And if they would refuse even that, he asked only one small mercy: that they not tell Makkah he had come to them seeking shelter, because his enemies there were already looking for any reason to crush him.

Their answer could not have been worse. One of them sneered that surely Allah could have found someone better than him to send. The second said that if this man truly were the Messenger

of Allah, he would go and tear down the covering of the Kaaba in protest. The third swore he would never so much as speak to him: if you really are a messenger, you are too great for me to answer; and if you are lying, you are too low for me to bother with. Three men, and three doors slammed in the face of the most truthful human being who ever lived.

Then they broke even the small mercy he had asked for. They sent word to Makkah anyway. And as a parting gift they did something crueller still. They lined up the slaves and the children and the fools of the city in two narrow rows along his path, and as the Prophet ﷺ made his way out they stoned him, kicked him, spat on him, and screamed at him.

A long road, and the blood in his sandals

The historians say it was about fourteen miles of this. Fourteen miles of being driven downhill out of the mountains while stones rained on him and voices hurled insults, the kind of words a person never forgets. The stones collected in his sandals as he ran, and they came so fast and so hard that he could not even stop to pull them out. He bled from the blows and he bled from the stones underfoot, until, as he himself later said, by the time he came out of it he did not even know where he was.

He found himself at last in a garden, an orchard outside the city, and he sat down under a vine, alone, with no friend, no protector, no human being anywhere who wanted him. And there, in that condition, drenched in his own blood, he turned his face to his Lord and wept and called out to Him.

This is the moment to slow down. Because here is the Prophet of Allah ﷺ at the absolute floor of his life, having gone to the city that should have embraced him and been beaten out of it by its

lowest people, and what he does in that moment is not curse them, and not give up. He prays. The famous supplication of Ta'if belongs to this garden, the prayer in which he complained of his weakness only to Allah, and said that as long as Allah was not angry with him, nothing else mattered.

And the garden, as it happened, belonged to two of the most prominent men of Makkah, Utbah and Shaybah, the sons of Rabi'ah. They were no friends of his. Both of them would later die fighting against him at Badr. They watched this broken man under their vine, and something in them stirred, the way even hard hearts sometimes feel a flicker they did not ask for. But their idea of nobility was small. They did not go to him. They did not bring him into the house, or clean his wounds, or offer him the comfort that their long familiarity with him should have demanded. Instead they called for their servant, a slave they owned, and told him: take some grapes out to that man.

The servant's name was Addas.

The grapes and the basmala

Think for a moment about the strange path that brought this man here. Addas was not from Arabia at all. He was a Christian, from far away in the north, and somehow the turning of the world had carried him into slavery and set him down in this orchard, owned by these two particular men, on this particular afternoon. He had been a slave in that region for years and, by his own admission, had never once met a person there who worshipped God alone. And now he was the one chosen to carry a plate of grapes to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

He came and set the grapes before him. And as the Prophet ﷺ reached out his hand to eat, he said, "In the name of Allah," and

ate.

Addas stopped. Those words caught him completely. He said, "These are words the people of this land do not say." In all his years among them he had never heard anyone speak like that. Where had it come from?

The Prophet ﷺ answered the question with a question. He asked Addas where he was from. Addas said he was from Nineveh. And the Prophet ﷺ, beaten and bleeding under that vine, his eyes still wet, said something that must have stopped the man's heart: "From the town of the righteous man, Yunus, son of Matta?"

Addas was stunned. "How do you know Yunus?" he asked. "Who is he to you?" A man from Nineveh, far away, a Christian, hearing the name of the prophet of his own land spoken by a stranger in an Arabian orchard. And the Prophet ﷺ said, "He is my brother. He was a prophet, and I am a prophet." He told him that Allah had sent them all with the same single message: to worship Him alone.

From the house, Utbah and Shaybah were watching. They saw their slave change before their eyes, saw his curiosity break open into something else. And then they saw Addas bend down and begin to kiss the hands of the Prophet ﷺ, kiss his feet, weeping over a man their own city had thrown away. When they called him back they were laughing. "This man," they said, "has corrupted you. Be careful." Addas answered them simply: there is no one on the earth better than this man. He has told me something only a prophet could know. They mocked him for it, and they sent the Prophet ﷺ on his way.

And that is all we are told. Addas vanishes from the story here, with grape juice perhaps still on his fingers and tears still on his face. We do not know what happened to him after. But what

happened in that garden is enough. In the very pit of his rejection, with the wounds still fresh, Allah sent His Prophet ﷺ a believer. Not one of the chiefs. Not one of the elites who had refused him. A slave. A foreigner. The lowest, by the world's reckoning, of all the people present that day.

Why a follower of Yunus

There is a detail in this that the Prophet ﷺ himself surely felt, and that we should not pass over.

Of all the prophets Allah could have connected to this moment, He sent the Prophet ﷺ a follower of Yunus. Not a follower of Musa, not a follower of Ibrahim, not one of the learned men of the scriptures. A man from Nineveh, the town of Yunus, peace be upon him. And followers of Yunus are rare in the whole of history.

Why Yunus, of all the prophets? Because the very first prophet whom Allah held up to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the order in which the Qur'an came down was Yunus. In the early revelation, the Prophet ﷺ was told:

Wait patiently [Prophet] for your Lord's judgement: do not be like the man in the whale who called out in distress: if his Lord's grace had not reached him, he would have been left, abandoned and blameworthy, on the barren shore, but his Lord chose him and made him one of the Righteous.

QUR'AN 68:48-50

Yunus had a unique experience among all the prophets. He is the one who, for a time, gave up on his people and walked away from them before Allah had given him leave to. No one should imagine this lowers his rank: Allah chose him and made him among the righteous, and his ending was greater than his beginning. But the

lesson was carved into the earliest words the Prophet ﷺ received: do not walk away from your people prematurely. You do not know who your people are, or what may yet come out of them.

So look at the mercy and the precision of it. The Prophet ﷺ has just been driven out of Ta'if. The blood is not yet dry. Any one of us, in that state, would have been done with those people forever, would have prayed for their destruction and never looked back. And in that exact moment Allah sends him a follower of the one prophet whose whole story is a warning against giving up on people too soon. It was as if heaven itself leaned down to remind him: be patient. Do not abandon them. You cannot see what I can see.

And He was right not to let him give up. Years later, when Makkah had fallen and the tribe of Thaqif sent its delegation to Madinah to enter Islam, among them, by some of the narrations, was one of those very chiefs who had given the Prophet ﷺ the worst day of his life. And the Prophet ﷺ forgave him and accepted his Islam, the way Yusuf forgave his brothers. The garden of Ta'if was a wound. It was also a seed.

The way this religion always moves

There is a second thing to take from Addas, and the Prophet ﷺ said it plainly elsewhere: this religion does not begin with the powerful. In every society it took root, Islam started not with the elites but with the weak, the vulnerable, the overlooked. The Prophet ﷺ taught that he was to be sought among the lowly, that the believers are given help and provision through their weak ones.

The first to carry the message in this region was not a chief of Ta'if behind his walls of wealth. It was a nameless slave who happened to be holding a plate of grapes. And this is no accident of history. It is the very nature of the message. The weak come first because there is the least between them and the truth, the fewest barriers of pride and property and standing. The chiefs of Ta'if had every worldly reason to say yes and they said no. Addas had nothing, and he fell to his knees.

So when you measure a person's nearness to Allah, set aside the scale the world uses. The world counted Addas as property. Allah counted him as the first fruit of the hardest day of His Messenger's life, and recorded his name in the story of this faith forever, while the names of the three chiefs who turned the Prophet ﷺ away are barely remembered at all.

What the life of Addas asks of our faith

It is easy to read about Addas and feel only a kind of wonder at the timing of it, the way Allah set a Christian slave from Nineveh in a particular orchard on a particular afternoon. That wonder is good. But his life is not only a marvel to admire. It is a question put to our own iman.

Start with him. Addas had every reason the world recognises to be bitter and closed. He had been torn from his homeland, enslaved, owned by men who treated grapes for a wounded stranger as the limit of their kindness. And yet when the truth crossed his path, he did not let his hardship harden him against it. He heard one sentence, the name of Allah spoken over food, and his heart was open enough to recognise it. Most of us guard our hearts behind our circumstances. We tell ourselves we will believe more, or give more, or soften more, once life is easier, once we have been treated better. Addas had been treated worse

than almost anyone in that story, and he was still the one whose heart was ready. Ask yourself honestly whether your hardships have made you softer toward Allah or harder, because the same hardship can do either, and the choice is yours.

Then take the lesson Allah pressed on His Prophet ﷺ through this man: do not give up on people, and do not give up on the good you are trying to do, just because the result is not visible yet. The Prophet ﷺ went to Ta'if and, by every measure a person could see that day, failed completely. He was rejected, mocked, stoned, and sent away bleeding. And yet that failure was carrying, hidden inside it, the conversion of Addas, and beyond that the forgiveness of a chief who would one day return as a believer, and beyond that the slow unfolding of a mercy the Prophet ﷺ could not yet perceive. This is the patience the Qur'an demanded of him in those early words about Yunus, and it is asked of you too. You will do good for the sake of Allah and see nothing come of it. You will give the kind word, raise the child, keep the prayer, speak the truth, carry the burden, and the world will show you no result. Do not be like the man who walked away from his people before his Lord allowed it. Your task is the doing, sincerely, for Allah. The fruit is His to bring, in His time, often through a door you never thought to watch.

And let this settle deepest of all: Allah sees the one the world does not see. No one in Makkah was thinking about Addas. No one would have written his name on any list of people who mattered. But Allah knew him, and reached down into his slavery and his exile and gave him, in a single afternoon, what kings and chiefs were refused, the gift of recognising the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and believing in him. If you have ever felt unseen, overlooked, too small or too far from the centre of things to matter to your Lord, the grapes of that garden are an answer to

you. Guidance is not handed out according to rank. It is a provision, a sustenance, that Allah grants to whom He wills, and He has a particular tenderness for the ones the world walks past.

So take one thing from Addas into your own ordinary days. When hardship comes, refuse to let it close your heart to Allah; let it soften you toward Him instead. Do one good deed for His sake without needing to see it bear fruit. And carry quietly the certainty that your Lord sees you precisely when no one else does, and that a single sincere turn toward Him, even from the lowest place a person can stand, is never wasted. May Allah be pleased with Addas, the brother in faith of a prophet he never met, and grant us hearts as ready as his to know the truth the moment it is set before us.

This chapter follows the account of Addas (RA) of Ta'if in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (68:48-50). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Mughira ibn Shu'ba

The Prophet's Bodyguard

There is a kind of man the world meets and decides it already understands. Clever, hard, useful in a fight, dangerous to cross, a man with a past it is wiser not to ask about. Makkah and Ta'if knew that man well, and his name was Mughira ibn Shu'ba (may Allah be pleased with him). He came from Thaqif, the tribe of Ta'if, the people said to be the most intelligent and most cunning of all the Arabs, and he was among the sharpest of them. His intelligence was real. So was his trickery. And before Islam reached his heart, he used both in the worst ways a man can.

What makes his story worth reading slowly is not that he was clever. It is what Islam did with a clever man who had blood on his hands, and how Allah took a life that began in treachery and ended it standing guard, with his whole body, over the most beloved man who ever lived.

A past he could not undo on his own

He told the story himself, and he did not soften it. He set out from Ta'if with thirteen men of Banu Malik, a subtribe of Thaqif, bound for Egypt to visit the Muqawqis, the Coptic ruler known for his generosity. The Muqawqis received visitors well; he would welcome them, give them gifts, send them home richer than they came. So the group went, hoping for that. Mughira went with them, though he was the only one not truly of their circle. His

own uncle had warned him before he left. None of your father's people are with you, the uncle said. If anyone is left out of this, it will be you. It is dangerous for you to go. Mughira went anyway.

The warning proved exact. The Muqawqis received the fourteen of them, seated the man he already knew beside himself, and asked whether all of them were from Banu Malik. All of us, the man answered, except one. So when the gifts were handed out, Mughira watched the others receive and receive while he was passed over. He was not yet a Muslim. He carried no restraint that night except his own cold calculation. On the road home he weighed attacking thirteen armed men and dismissed it as foolish. Then he thought of something else.

He got wine, good wine, and he poured it for them. He told them he had a headache and would serve rather than drink, and he kept pouring until they no longer knew where they were. Then he killed them, all thirteen, and took everything they carried. He tied up their camels, gathered their goods, and rode away telling himself he was set for life, that he need never go back to Ta'if at all. That was Mughira before Islam. It is an ugly story, and the lecture does not pretend otherwise. It is told plainly because it shows something the heart needs to see: that there is a door open even to a man like this.

The wealth he would not keep

Word of Islam reached him, and something in him turned toward it. He gathered everything he had taken and made his way to Madinah. He arrived as a man clearly well off, a big man with a string of camels and a load of plunder. The Prophet ﷺ was sitting with Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) when Mughira approached, and by then people knew what had happened on that road. Abu Bakr looked at him and said, in

effect, I know where you have come from. Mughira admitted it. He told them he had done what he had done, that this was simply the way of the days of ignorance, that men cheated and exploited and stole from one another, and that those men had wronged him first so he had wronged them in return.

Then he said the thing that changed everything. I do not want it anymore. I want to become Muslim. Take all of this, he offered, and use it for the sake of Allah. Let me clean my hands. Let me be forgiven. He was ready to hand over the entire fortune to wash the past off himself.

The Prophet ﷺ accepted his Islam at once. But he would not touch the goods. That is wealth taken in treachery, he told him, and I want nothing to do with it. Your Islam I accept; that money I cannot. There was a process to undoing the harm, returning what could be returned to the tribe that had been wronged, and that process did not vanish because a man had repented. Mughira was frightened now in a way the killing had never frightened him. Am I forgiven, he asked. The Prophet ﷺ assured him that everything before Islam could be forgiven, that Islam wipes away what came before it, but that the stolen wealth was not the Prophet's to take and bless. His past sin was lifted from his soul. The consequences in this world he still had to face like a man. There is a mercy in that distinction, and there is a seriousness in it. Allah forgives, fully and freely. He does not thereby pretend that what was stolen was not stolen.

The hand he struck away

So Mughira stayed in Madinah and became, alongside one other man, one of only two believers from Tha'qif living with the Prophet ﷺ at that time. And he did something no one assigned him. He appointed himself the Prophet's guard. He told it himself:

I used to be as close to the Prophet ﷺ as Abu Bakr. He took it upon himself to be at his side always, to stand at his door, to move when he moved, to protect him at all costs. The same eyes that had once read a caravan for its weakness now read every room the Prophet ﷺ entered, watching for the one hand that might do him harm.

He was tall, the histories say, extremely tall, with heavy muscles and wide shoulders and powerful legs, his thick hair tied back in four braids. Picture that man planted at the door. One day he saw his own uncle approach the Prophet ﷺ and reach out to put his hand on the Prophet's beard. Mughira struck the hand away. If you want your hand back, he told his uncle, do not put it on the beard of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ again.

And the uncle gave a bitter answer that pulls Mughira's whole past back into the frame. I am still paying off your mess, he said. He was the closest relative to Mughira, and after the killing of those thirteen men it was he who had to pay the blood money, the full compensation, and make peace with Banu Malik for what his nephew had done. I only just finished cleaning up after you, he was saying, and now here you stand striking my hand away to guard this man. It is a moment heavy with everything that had changed. The old life had cost his family dearly, and here was the new life, refusing to let even a relative lay a careless hand on the Prophet ﷺ. Mughira had a past. He did not pretend he did not. But he was no longer that man.

He was among the companions who gave the Pledge of the Tree, the pledge Allah Himself praised:

God was pleased with the believers when they swore allegiance to you [Prophet] under the tree: He knew what

*was in their hearts and so He sent tranquillity down to them
and rewarded them with a speedy triumph*

QUR'AN 48:18

A man whose name had once meant treachery now stood among the believers whose hearts Allah looked into and was pleased with. His repentance was sincere. His faith was real. The past was real too. Islam held both truths at once.

The tent beside the mosque

Then the story comes full circle in a way only Allah arranges. Years earlier, when the Prophet ﷺ had gone to Ta'if and been driven out, stoned and bloodied and nearly killed, he had made a quiet prayer that this people would one day come back to him as Muslims. In time a chief of Thaqif accepted Islam and went home to call his people to it, and they killed him for it. When the news of that killing settled on them, fear settled with it. The man they had killed was now tied to the Prophet ﷺ, and Mughira too was aligned with him in Madinah. They feared what their crime might bring down on them, so they sent a delegation of thirteen men to Madinah to make peace.

So the very thing the murdered chief had wanted, his people turning toward Islam, came about, though it came through fear rather than through love. Thirteen men of the tribe that had once tortured the Prophet ﷺ now rode into his city. Imagine being the man who had been stoned in their streets, spat on, very nearly killed, who had then sent them an emissary they murdered, and now that delegation stood in your own city, in your power. The world would have understood revenge. It was, by every worldly measure, time for payback.

The Prophet ﷺ wanted no revenge. Ramadan was approaching. Mughira came to him and asked for an honour: these are my cousins, let me be the one to receive them. There was something else folded into the request, a chance to make peace with the very people he had once wronged so terribly, to win back their hearts and his own. The Prophet ﷺ agreed, but with a condition. Pitch a tent for them in the corner of the mosque. Why? So they could hear the Qur'an recited. So they could watch the believers pray. So that the sight of it might soften their hearts. I am not interested in revenge, the gesture says. Let them simply see us as we are. Let them stand at the edge of Ramadan in Madinah and watch a people at prayer.

What good is a religion with no prayer

What followed was one of the strangest negotiations in the Prophet's life, and his patience through it is the lesson. The delegation, with Islam only beginning to enter their hearts, began bargaining. They would accept Islam, they said, but they had conditions. Let us keep our adultery. The Prophet ﷺ said no; what is forbidden is forbidden. One man among them had ten wives and wanted to keep them all; he was told to keep four and release the rest. They wanted to keep their usury, the interest that was the engine of their trade; they were told no, that they would have the principal of their wealth, wronging no one and being wronged by no one. They said they would not fight and would not give charity, no battles and no zakah. Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), listening, was ready to be done with them, certain these were hypocrites. The Prophet ﷺ told him to leave it. Once they become Muslim, he said, they will fight and they will give their charity. I know what I am doing.

Then they came to the prayer. We do not want to pray five times a day, they said. Can we pray twice? And the Prophet ﷺ said something worth carrying for the rest of one's life. What good is there in a religion with no prayer? He let them begin with two, knowing they were a hard people who needed to get over the first hill, knowing what they did not yet know about themselves. Umar was unsettled; this was not how it was done, five prayers from the start. But the Prophet ﷺ could see past the bargaining to the believers these men would become.

Last of all came the idol. Their great stone idol, al-Lat, had to go. You would think that the most obvious surrender of all, and it was the one they clung to hardest. If we destroy it, they said, it will destroy us. Mughira, his cunning now in the service of faith, could barely contain himself. You are afraid of stone, he said. You are afraid of rocks you built yourselves. They turned on him: we did not come to speak to you, leave us be. The Prophet ﷺ held his patience and held his line. The idol must go. Everything but that, they said. The idol must go, he repeated. At last they agreed, on the condition that someone else destroy it, because they would not raise their own hands against it for fear of what al-Lat would do.

So Mughira went, who had once fled this very people as a fugitive and now returned to break their god. He climbed the great stone, and being who he was he made a show of it. He raised his pickaxe, struck, and fell back clutching his hand as if paralysed. The people cried out the idol's name in terror, certain it had struck him down. Then Mughira stood up grinning. You foolish people, he said, I told you this thing can do nothing to you. And he beat the idol to pieces in front of them, to show them with his own body how empty their fear had been, how dead the stone

they had trembled before. With that, Ta'if at last began to taste the sweetness of Islam.

The smartest man in the city

The Prophet ﷺ refined Mughira's character, but his sharpness never left him; it was simply turned toward good. He stayed at the Prophet's side and narrated a great deal about him, about how he prayed, how he travelled, the small daily habits of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ that only a man always near him would know. After the Prophet's passing, Umar trusted him with real authority. He was governor over Bahrain, and over Kufa, and over Basra. Some thought him too hard, but Umar valued exactly that hardness, and Mughira served him as a capable man.

His enemies once tried to ruin him with a clever trap. Knowing Umar despised those who took bribes, a group arranged for one of them to bring Umar a hundred thousand, claiming Mughira had skimmed it from the treasury and bribed them with it, that they were returning it out of nobility. Umar summoned Mughira and put the charge to him. Mughira did not flinch. Where is the other hundred thousand, he asked the accuser. I gave you two hundred. The man broke under the pressure and confessed the whole thing was a lie. Why did you do that, Umar asked him afterward. Because I wanted them to learn, Mughira said, that lying never benefits them. He had read the lie the way he once read a caravan, and turned it back on the liars.

He was sent as an emissary to great leaders, including to the commander of Persia before the battle of Qadisiyyah. He lost an eye in battle. When civil strife, the fitnah, tore the community, he refused to take any side; he withdrew entirely from public life for years until it had passed, and only then returned, governing Kufa again in the time of Mu'awiyah (may Allah be pleased with him).

They said of him that if Madinah had eight gates and a man could escape only by scheming his way out, Mughira would find his way through all eight. Only one man, he admitted, ever outwitted him: a friend who, asked about a woman Mughira meant to marry, said he had seen her kiss a man. Mughira dropped the match, then later found her married to that very man. What happened, he asked. I saw her kiss her father, the friend said. You are the only one who ever outsmarted me, Mughira told him. He died in Kufa, around fifty years after the Hijrah.

His most beautiful trick

He saved his finest trick for last, and it was an act of love. Mughira had spent so much of his life guarding the Prophet's body that when the Prophet ﷺ died, he did not know what to do with himself. The family had taken up the washing and the care of the blessed body, and Mughira would not violate their space. For the first time he had to stand back. He could no longer stand at the door. He could no longer guard him with his own body. The closeness that had been his whole purpose was being taken from him.

So when they carried the Prophet ﷺ to his grave, Mughira let his ring slip from his hand and fall into it. Then he climbed down after it. He wanted, he said, to be the last person ever to touch the body of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Those near him understood what he had done and let it be. For the rest of his life he would say it: I am the last person who ever touched the Prophet ﷺ. The cunning that had once served a cold and grasping young man had become, at the end, a way of stealing one last moment of nearness to the one he loved.

What Mughira's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and treat it as a curiosity, the rough man with the colourful past who turned out all right. That would be to miss what his life is actually asking of us, because it asks something hard and hopeful at once.

It asks us to believe in the power of Allah's forgiveness without using it as an excuse. Mughira's slate before Islam was as dark as a man's can be, and the Prophet ﷺ told him plainly that Islam wipes away what came before it. If you carry a past, any past, hear that clearly: the door is open, and Allah is more merciful than your worst memory of yourself. But notice the other half. The Prophet ﷺ would not take the stolen wealth. Forgiveness lifted the sin from Mughira's soul; it did not pretend the theft had not happened or excuse him from setting right what he could. Real repentance, tawbah, is both. It is throwing yourself on Allah's mercy and it is the honest work of undoing harm where harm can be undone. Do not let the hope make you careless, and do not let the work make you despair.

It asks us, too, what we do with the gifts we were given before we knew Allah. Mughira's intelligence did not change when he believed; what changed was its direction. The same mind that schemed on a desert road later guarded a Prophet, broke an idol, exposed a liar, and stole a last touch of a beloved body out of pure love. Whatever you are good at, whatever sharpness or strength or skill the world taught you to use for yourself, ask what it would look like turned wholly toward Allah. He does not waste what He guides. He aims it.

And his life asks us to look hard at the Prophet's question: what good is there in a religion with no prayer? The men of Tha'qif wanted faith without its weight, belief that cost them nothing of their habits or their wealth or their mornings and evenings. The

Prophet ﷺ was patient with their first steps but never moved the destination. We are tempted by the same bargain in quieter ways, wanting nearness to Allah without the standing, the bowing, the daily turning toward Him that nearness is made of. So do one concrete thing today for His sake: guard a prayer you have been letting slip, and stand in it not as a tax paid but as the very substance of belief. Be near Him on purpose, the way Mughira chose to be near the Prophet ﷺ on purpose, until being near is simply who you are.

May Allah be pleased with Mughira ibn Shu'ba, forgive us our own dark roads as He forgave his, turn every gift we have toward His pleasure, and let us be among those whose hearts He looked into, under the tree, and was pleased.

This chapter follows the account of Mughira ibn Shu'ba (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (48:18). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Urwa ibn Mas'ud

The Chief Who Resembled Isa

There is a particular kind of story that does not move in a straight line. A man stands against the message for the better part of two decades, never quite as an enemy, never as a believer, circling it, weighing it, until one day he walks toward it of his own accord, gives everything to it, and is killed for it by the very people he loved most. Urwa ibn Mas'ud al-Thaqafi (may Allah be pleased with him) lived that kind of story. He was among the most noble men of all Arabia, a chief his own people would not dare to wake from sleep, and he died on a rooftop calling them to a single God while their arrows found him in the dark.

To understand the weight of what he laid down, you have to meet him first as the world saw him: a man of standing in two cities at once, a peacemaker, and one whose face, the Prophet ﷺ would say, recalled the face of a prophet.

A son of two cities

The story of Ta'if runs through one tribe, Banu Thaqif, for these were a people who knew themselves by their tribe and not so much by their town. Ta'if itself sits about seventy miles from Makkah, close enough that the two cities had long been bound by marriage, by trade, and by a careful mutual respect. Whoever was counted noble in the one was counted noble in the other. Urwa came from a lineage that mixed the best of both. His father,

Mas'ud, was reckoned among the most noble men of Ta'if. His mother, Subay'a, was one of the most noble women of Quraysh, and she was remembered not only for her standing but for her intelligence.

That intelligence left a mark on him early. He could recall, as a small child, the days of a great war among the Arabian tribes, when men were killing one another off in the way of the age of ignorance. In the middle of that violence his mother made a calculation. She pitched a tent and told her young sons to offer it as refuge to anyone fleeing the fighting. She would shelter them, tend the wounded, bring water. It was mercy, and it was wisdom: those who escaped death that day felt themselves forever in debt to her family. Her quick judgment in the crossfire earned her household a standing that her children would inherit.

Urwa grew into that inheritance and added to it. He established himself in Makkah by a deeply noble act. To avert a war between tribes, he paid out of his own pocket the blood money owed across those disputes, drawing on his own wealth and gathering the wealthy of the community to compensate the injured and restore calm to the city. Some of the historians say he was still paying down that debt until the day he died. This is the man before Islam: a merchant, a traveller, someone who loved peace and brought tribes together rather than setting them against one another. He married into the nobility of Makkah on every side. His sister was married to Safwan; his own wife was a daughter of Abu Sufyan; his son would marry a maternal cousin connected to the household of the Prophet ﷺ himself. He was woven into that society at its highest level.

And in all the early years of hostility against the Prophet ﷺ, when most of Makkah threw away the very morals it had once prided

itself on, when men who had been honourable took up lying and cheating and treachery to shut down the message, Urwa is simply not found among them. He kept his dignity even while standing on the wrong side.

The face from the night journey

He had one of the most striking appearances among all the companions, and it can be told in a single sentence: he looked like Isa, the son of Maryam, peace be upon him.

This was not a fancy. The Prophet ﷺ said, in an authentic narration, that the prophets had been shown to him on the night of the Isra'. He described Musa as a man of dark skin from the people of Shanu'ah. And then he said that he had seen Isa, the son of Maryam, and that the man who most resembled him was Urwa ibn Mas'ud al-Thaqafi. (He said too that he had seen Ibrahim, and that the one who resembled him most was the Prophet ﷺ himself, a descendant of Ibrahim.)

So Urwa is described with a powerful, striking beauty: a strong build, long hair, the look of a man born to be followed. There is a quiet lesson buried in that comparison. If you want to know what Isa looked like, the Prophet ﷺ was effectively saying, do not look to the paintings on church walls or the figures in films. Look to a man from the Arabs, from Ta'if. The image the world carries of Isa and the reality the Prophet ﷺ pointed to do not match, and the correction is itself a teaching.

Urwa was even touched upon in the Qur'an, though in a way that takes a moment to see. When the Prophet ﷺ first brought the message, the people of Makkah objected that revelation should surely have come to one of the great men of the two great towns, not to an orphan of modest means. Among the men they had in

mind was Urwa, "the man from Ta'if," set beside a chief of Makkah. The Qur'an records their words:

and they said, 'Why was this Quran not sent down to a distinguished man, from either of the two cities?'

QUR'AN 43:31

Notice what Allah does next, and what He does not do. He does not threaten these two men. He does not promise them punishment or describe their humiliation on the Day of Judgement. He simply quotes the foolish sentiment of a people who could think only in terms of tribe, wealth, and prestige, and then He falls silent about the two men themselves. Some of the scholars saw something tender in that silence. Had Allah gone on to condemn these men by name, it would have sealed their fate, as the fate of Abu Lahab was sealed elsewhere. But here the silence is mercy. One of those two men, Urwa, would indeed become a Muslim, and the quiet of the verse reads, in hindsight, like a glad tidings of a repentance still to come.

Hudaybiyyah, and the man who came to negotiate

For most of those years Ta'if stayed at the edge of the story. The Prophet ﷺ had once come to its people with Islam, and they had driven him away and stoned him, in what he would call the worst day of his life. After that, Ta'if largely ignored the affair, except when some of its tribes were hired as fighters against the Muslims. Urwa does not reappear until a decisive moment: the day of Hudaybiyyah.

The Prophet ﷺ had come from Madinah in peace, he and his companions in the white garments of pilgrimage, unarmed, intending only to visit the Sacred House. Makkah was caught in a

dilemma. To kill these pilgrims would violate their own sacred rites; to let them complete the pilgrimage would be a humiliation. So they sent negotiators, and after others had failed, they turned to Urwa, the diplomat who carried no Makkan blood and yet was trusted as a son of the city through his mother.

He went first to the leaders of Makkah and played on that bond. "Am I not to you like a son," he asked them, "and are you not to me like a father?" They affirmed it; they had no doubt in his integrity. "Let me go and try my hand with him," he said. "I am close enough to be trusted and far enough to be fair." He was, by his own reckoning, the perfect man for the task.

Urwa did not begin gently with the Prophet ﷺ. He tried a harder approach. Entering the camp, he looked around at the gathering and said, in effect, that he saw nothing around Muhammad but a mixture of every kind of person, races and tribes and classes thrown together with nothing to bind them. (It is, ironically, one of the most beautiful descriptions of that community ever given, though Urwa did not mean it as praise.) Then he reached for an insult that struck a nerve. These people, he said, this rabble, would scatter and flee from the Prophet ﷺ the moment a real force came against them.

Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), listening, lost his composure. To suggest that the companions would abandon the Prophet ﷺ was the deepest insult one could offer them. He turned on Urwa with words so vulgar that they became, for later scholars, the subject of whole chapters: how could a man as gentle as Abu Bakr speak that way? The answer the scholars drew is worth keeping. The exception is not the rule. A believer's default is to answer ugliness with something better, not to mirror it, not to descend into cursing at the first heated exchange. But

there are moments, rare ones, when a bully must be put firmly in his place, and the very rarity of the response is what gives it force. When Abu Bakr spoke, it took the air out of the room.

Urwa was stunned. He asked who had dared address him so. They told him it was Abu Bakr. And here his nobility showed itself in a way that has made strong men weep. He said that were it not for a favour Abu Bakr had once done him, long ago, he would have answered him in kind, but now they were even and he would let it pass. Some of the scholars explain the favour: when Urwa had once shouldered that blood money to make peace, Abu Bakr had quietly contributed to the noble effort, and Urwa had never forgotten it. That is loyalty. To remember, across years, a small kindness done to you and to count yourself still in its debt, this is a trait Islam came not to erase but to refine. Forgetting the favours done to you, and forgetting the favours you do for others, both belong to a generous soul. Urwa had the first half of it even in his days of ignorance.

The strategy of grandstanding failed, so Urwa tried to draw close. He reached out and began to stroke the beard of the Prophet ﷺ as he spoke, in the manner of intimate persuasion among the Arabs. But a man stood there in full armour, and each time Urwa's hand moved toward the Prophet ﷺ, this man pushed it away with the flat of his sword. "If you want your hand to stay attached to you," he warned, "keep it off the Messenger of Allah." Urwa demanded to know who this rough, armoured man was. The Prophet ﷺ smiled and told him: it was his own nephew, al-Mughira ibn Shu'ba. The nephew added a cutting line about an old debt of Urwa's that he had been cleaning up until only the night before, a matter between the two of them, but the message was plain. The Makkan tactic had been to bully an unarmed man. It was not going to work.

The Prophet ﷺ told Urwa simply: we did not come to fight. We came in peace. Let us complete what we came for, and no one is harmed. And as Urwa stepped back and watched, the whole purpose of his mission dissolved in front of him, because he saw something he could not argue with.

What a diplomat saw

Urwa had stood in the courts of the most powerful men alive. He returned to Makkah and told his people so. "I have entered upon Caesar, upon Chosroes, upon the Negus," he said, naming the three great kings of the age. "I have never seen a king so revered by his people as Muhammad is by his companions."

Then he described it, and the description is one of the treasures of the seerah. The Prophet ﷺ did not dominate them by fine clothes or by anything pompous. He dressed as they dressed, lived in a house smaller than theirs, ate less than they ate. And yet, Urwa said, when the Prophet ﷺ made his ablution, they would all but fight one another for the water that ran from him. If he gave a command, they rushed to obey it before the words had settled. When he spoke, they lowered their voices, and they would not even fix their eyes on his face out of reverence for him. "I have seen a people," Urwa told Makkah, "who will not give this man up for anything in the world."

This was the same man who had sworn those companions would scatter and flee. Now he came back to say it would never happen. And he went further. The Prophet ﷺ, he told them, was offering a fair deal, asking nothing strange, treating them with honour. There was no reason to fight him. Give it up. Makkah did not listen. They kept up their aggression, and in time they violated the very treaty that Hudaibiyyah produced, and the road to the conquest of Makkah opened. But a seed had been planted

in Urwa himself. He had looked closely, the way an honest man does, and he had seen what was there.

The walk to Madinah, and the warning

When the Prophet ﷺ later marched on Makkah, he came not in revenge but in mercy, forgiving the people who had hounded him for twenty years. Then came the campaigns of Hunayn and the siege of Ta'if. The Prophet ﷺ surrounded his own most painful city and held it under a tightening siege, yet he would not charge in, because in his heart he wanted these people guided, not destroyed. When his companions were wounded trying to force the walls, he chose to withdraw rather than spill more blood. When some asked him to curse the people of Ta'if for striking them with arrows, he raised his hands instead and prayed, "O Allah, guide Thaqif and bring them to me." It was the same mercy the angel had once offered to turn into vengeance, and the same answer the Prophet ﷺ had given then: no.

During all of this, Urwa was not even in Ta'if. He was away, occupied with the craft of war, learning the working of weapons and siege engines like the catapult. But when word reached him of what had happened, of the amnesty, of the forgiveness, of a Prophet who had refused to make a bloodbath of the people who had oppressed him for two decades, something settled in him. He went to Madinah, on his own, to become a Muslim.

The Prophet ﷺ rose to receive him, overjoyed. The whole atmosphere had reversed. Urwa told him plainly that even at Hudaibiyyah he had known there was something different about this man, that he carried the bearing of a prophet. Abu Bakr, who had once flung those harsh words at him, now insisted Urwa stay in his home. His nephew al-Mughira refused to allow it and pressed until Urwa stayed with him instead. The man who had

warned him to keep his hand off the Prophet ﷺ now would not let him lodge anywhere but under his own roof.

Then Urwa said he would go back to his people and call them to Islam. And the Prophet ﷺ, who knew Ta'if better than anyone, warned him. "They will kill you," he said. "Your people are not ready for this." Urwa could not believe it. "My people love me," he answered. "If they saw me sleeping, they would not dare wake me." He was the chief, the man they revered. They would never harm him. And here the Prophet ﷺ was, in truth, speaking from his own life. He too had been loved by his people, until he told them to abandon their idols, and then they had run him out and tried to break him. He was telling Urwa: I know how this goes. You think love will protect you. The moment you ask them to give up their gods, everything turns. But Urwa insisted. "Let me try. I know my people. I will bring them back to you as Muslims."

The adhan on the rooftop

He had been gone a long time, and his people came to greet him in the old way of the days of ignorance. He answered them instead with the greeting of the people of Paradise: peace, as-salamu alaykum. "Are you serious?" they asked. He said yes. He was a Muslim. He had gone to Madinah, and Muhammad ﷺ was truly a prophet of Allah, and there was only one God, and he wanted all of them to enter Islam.

What happened in his own house that night was a bitter foreshadowing. There were harsh words, then a scuffle, hands thrown, anger, though no one was killed. He was entirely alone, with no one beside him, still trusting that the chief of his people could never come to harm among them. They left his house in their fury. Urwa thought the matter would cool by morning.

When dawn came, he climbed to the rooftop, and he called the adhan, the first adhan ever raised in Ta'if. And his people answered the call to prayer with arrows. He was struck down by men of one of the subtribes, hit and mortally wounded, though he did not die at once. It had not gone the way he was sure it would go.

As he lay dying, his people, thinking now in the old tribal way, vowed to avenge him by killing ten of the leaders of the tribe responsible. They had no love for his new religion, but they would not let his blood pass unanswered. Urwa stopped them. "Do not kill anyone on my account," he said. "Let my blood be charity. Let there be peace between you and them." And he asked one thing: "When I die, bury me with the martyrs who were killed outside Ta'if before the Muslims left you." He was laid to rest among the shuhada of that earlier battle.

When the news reached the Prophet ﷺ, he likened Urwa to a man whose story Allah tells in the Qur'an, the believer of Surah Ya-Sin who came running to his people to call them to the messengers and was killed for it. Of that man Allah relates that even in death his words were not of revenge but of longing for his people's guidance: that he wished his people could know how his Lord had forgiven him and placed him among the honoured. So Urwa ibn Mas'ud died as a martyr, the chief who resembled Isa, calling his people to the one God with his last breath, and grieving, even then, that they would not follow him.

What Urwa's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and stop at the drama of it: the noble face, the courtly negotiations, the arrows in the dark. But Urwa did not die for character or for courage. He died because, having seen the truth clearly, he could not hold it back from the

people he loved, even when he knew it might cost him his life. His life asks something of our own iman, and the question is sharper than admiration.

He acted on the truth the moment he was sure of it. For twenty years Urwa circled the message, honourable but unconvinced. Then, at Hudaybiyyah, he looked closely with an honest eye, and what he saw he could not unsee. He did not wait for it to become safe or convenient. He went to Madinah on his own feet and surrendered. Most of us already believe far more than we live by. We know the prayer is due, the wrong is wrong, the good is waiting to be done, and still we wait, hoping the cost will fall before we move. Urwa moved. Ask yourself what truth you have already seen clearly, and have been postponing because acting on it will cost you something.

He gave the message away without protecting himself. He could have stayed in Madinah, safe and honoured, a chief who had found his faith. Instead he walked back into the one place most likely to kill him, because he could not bear for his own people to be left in the dark while he had the light. That is the heart of caring for others for Allah's sake: not wanting Paradise only for yourself, but being unable to rest while those you love are heading elsewhere. You will not climb a rooftop into a hail of arrows. But there are people in your life whom you have quietly given up on, whose guidance you have decided is not your concern. Urwa asks whether your love for them is real enough to risk their displeasure for the sake of their soul.

He let his blood be charity. Struck down, dying, with every tribal instinct around him screaming for revenge, his last instruction was peace. He turned the worst thing done to him into a gift, and he gave it for the sake of reconciliation, not for the eyes of any

man, for he was nearly gone. That is sincerity at its purest: the good done when there is no audience and no reward left to collect in this world, only Allah watching. Most of our forgiveness is negotiated; we forgive when it is repaid, when it is seen, when it costs little. His was free. When someone wrongs you, his life asks whether you can let it go for Allah alone, expecting nothing back.

And here is the mercy in it, the part that should steady your heart. The Prophet ﷺ had warned Urwa that his people would not love the truth as he hoped, and they did not. By every worldly measure his mission failed. He won no city, converted no crowd, and was killed by the very people he came to save. Yet Allah placed him among the martyrs and likened him to a believer the Qur'an itself honours. The outcome was never his to secure. The sincerity was. What looked, from the rooftops of Ta'if, like a chief who threw his life away on a lost cause was in truth a man who had everything to live for and spent it on Allah, and lost nothing at all.

So take one thing from him into an ordinary life. Act on one piece of truth you have been delaying, because you saw it clearly and that is enough. Speak to one person you love about what matters most, and accept that they may not thank you for it. And when you are wronged, forgive once for Allah alone, with no account kept and no repayment sought. That is how the chief who resembled Isa lived his last days, in conviction, in care for his people, and in a sincerity that asked the world for nothing. May Allah be pleased with Urwa ibn Mas'ud, grant us the courage to live by what we already know, and gather us with the martyrs and the truthful who called their people home.

This chapter follows the account of Urwa ibn Mas'ud (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (43:31). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Al-Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib

The Uncle of the Prophet ﷺ

There was a man who, if he walked into Madinah in the first decades after the Prophet ﷺ was buried, would empty a gathering of its pride. Companions who had fought at Badr, who had memorised the Qur'an from the mouth of the Prophet ﷺ himself, would rise to their feet for him, take his hand and kiss it, lower themselves before an old man with two grey braids falling to his shoulders, and ask him to make du'a for them. The next generation, who never saw the Prophet ﷺ and ached for any thread that still touched him, would crowd around the same old man and whisper, who is he? And the answer was the most beautiful answer a man could carry: that is the uncle of the Prophet ﷺ. That is what is left of him among us.

His name was al-Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib (may Allah be pleased with him), and he appears in nearly every story of the seerah without ever quite getting a story of his own. You hear his name again and again, the man at the edge of every scene, and then you move on. His own son, Abdullah ibn Abbas, would grow so luminous that the father is often reduced to a single line of introduction in the life of the son. But to understand the mercy of the Prophet ﷺ toward his family, and what it means for Allah to know what is in a heart the world cannot see, you have to slow down and look directly at the uncle.

The lion before the roar

He was one of the youngest sons of Abd al-Muttalib, born only about three years before the Prophet ﷺ, close enough in age that the two looked like brothers more than uncle and nephew. When the Prophet ﷺ received revelation, four of his uncles were still alive. The two elder ones were Abu Talib, who protected him without believing, and Abu Lahab, who abused him and died his enemy. The two younger ones, half uncle and half older brother, were Hamza and al-Abbas, and these two would enter Islam.

Their very names tell you something. Both mean a lion, but each describes a different moment of the hunt. Al-Abbas is the lion as it circles its prey and begins to roar, deliberate and watchful. Hamza is the lion once it has seized its prey and begun to tear into it, all force and fearless attack. And the names fit the men. Hamza (may Allah be pleased with him) threw himself into the heart of the enemy, the Lion of Allah. Al-Abbas was the careful one, who took his time reading a situation before he moved. Allah names His servants, sometimes, before they become what they will be.

He was, by every account, a striking man: noble, awe-inspiring, intelligent, beautiful. He had hayba, that presence Allah clothes certain people in, so that a room naturally quiets when they enter. He was fair-skinned and among the tallest men of Makkah, built, it was said, like a camel when he rose to his full height. And he had one gift peculiar to him alone: a voice that carried for miles. In his old age he would simply climb to a high place and call out, and his words would reach men far in the distance. It was not an arrogant voice. It was an instrument, and one day, in the panic of a battlefield, that instrument would save an army.

The man you asked about Makkah

Before any of that, al-Abbas held a particular place in the life of his city. His father had entrusted him with the care of Zamzam, so he stood near the centre of Makkah's hospitality, tending to the pilgrims who came from far away. He was one of the richest men in the city, a tradesman who travelled to Syria and Yemen, famous for the spices and musk he carried back. And because he knew the wider world through his trade, he was the first man a traveller would seek out for news. If you came to Makkah and wanted to know what was happening, you went to al-Abbas.

So it is no accident that he keeps surfacing in the stories of others. When Afif al-Kindi, a business partner of his, came to Makkah and saw the strangest sight of his life, a man praying before the Kaaba in a way he had never seen, bowing and prostrating, a boy at his side and a woman behind them, it was al-Abbas who explained it: that is my nephew Muhammad ﷺ, the boy is Ali, the woman is Khadijah, and no one on the face of the earth follows this religion but those three.

His own wife was already among the believers. Lubabah bint al-Harith, Umm al-Fadl (may Allah be pleased with her), was very likely the first woman to accept Islam after Khadijah, and she never hid it. And so al-Abbas lived in a house full of belief while his own position remained ambiguous, a righteous wife praying at his side and quietly praying for him, asking Allah to bring her husband to Islam and to free him from the usury he dealt in, sensing its harm even before it was forbidden.

The uncle who was never an enemy

When the Prophet ﷺ first announced his message, al-Abbas was never hostile. Like Abu Talib, he took a protective but neutral stance: you are my nephew, I will defend you, but I will not profess your religion. Why he held back is one of the great

puzzles of the seerah; the scholars cannot agree on when, exactly, he became Muslim, and some narrations suggest he had believed in secret long before. What is clear is that his hesitation never came from disbelief or enmity. His heart was already leaning, even while his tongue stayed silent.

When Abu Talib died and the oldest shield was gone, al-Abbas stepped into the role of protector. And here you see the strange split inside one family. While Abu Lahab walked behind the Prophet ﷺ in the marketplaces and at Hajj, stoning him and calling him a liar, the other uncle took him by the hand and walked him toward the tribes who came from afar, searching for a people who might take his nephew in. Abu Lahab was working to bury the message. Al-Abbas was working to find it a home.

That search led to the Ansar. When that small band of young men from Yathrib offered themselves, al-Abbas was the skeptic, and his caution is moving precisely because it was love. Almost none of the Ansar were over twenty-five. They might be sincere, he worried, but did these youths understand what they were signing up for? So on the night the second pledge was taken, in the lowest part of Aqaba, it was al-Abbas who spoke first. He told them plainly: this man is honoured among his own family, who will protect him whether they follow him or not. If you take him, every Arab will turn against you. If you are a people of war who can bear that, then take him; if not, leave him, and we will care for him. They answered that they were a people of war who had inherited it. And when one asked what they would receive in return, and the answer came back, Paradise, they said: we accept, we want nothing else.

Then comes the irony at the centre of his life. As that pledge of Islam was sealed, it was al-Abbas standing there, joining the

hands, sending the Prophet ﷺ off to safety with these strangers. And by every outward measure, al-Abbas himself was not yet a Muslim. He arranged the Hijrah; he did not make it.

The prisoner at Badr

Then came Badr, and with it one of the most quietly devastating scenes in his life. Before the fighting, the Prophet ﷺ told his companions that there were men on the other side who had been dragged out against their will, and named two of them. One was al-Abbas. Do not kill them, he said. Capture them if you can.

A small companion named Abu al-Yusr found him on that field. Al-Abbas was an enormous man and Abu al-Yusr was slight, so the encounter should have been impossible. But Abu al-Yusr described what he saw: al-Abbas was standing perfectly still, like an idol, hands at his sides, and his eyes were wet. He was weeping, this man dragged into a battle against his own nephew, watching fathers and brothers about to kill one another. He surrendered without a fight and was led back, to the astonishment of the companions. How did you capture him, the Prophet ﷺ asked. A man helped me, said Abu al-Yusr, a man I have never seen before or since. And the Prophet ﷺ smiled and said a noble angel had helped him.

That night the Prophet ﷺ could not sleep. When his companions asked why, he said he could hear his uncle groaning in his chains. Some of them went and loosened al-Abbas's bonds, and the Prophet ﷺ, hearing of it, was pleased, but he said: then do it for all the prisoners, not only for him. He would not let his uncle be treated as a special case, just as he had said that if his own daughter Fatimah stole he would apply the punishment to her.

Then the ransoming came. The Prophet ﷺ told him to ransom himself and three of his kin. And here al-Abbas said it at last: O Messenger of Allah, I was already a Muslim. The Prophet ﷺ answered with perfect justice and perfect trust: Allah knows your reality best; if what you claim is true, He will reward you for it. But as for the outward matter, it stands against you, so ransom yourself. He would not bend the visible law on the strength of a private claim. When al-Abbas pleaded that he had no money, the Prophet ﷺ named the exact sum he and Umm al-Fadl had hidden away, and the instruction he had given her in case he died in battle, words no living soul but the two of them had heard. Al-Abbas trembled. By Allah, he said, you are truly the Messenger of Allah, for no one knew of that but me and Umm al-Fadl. He paid the largest ransom of Badr; more captives were freed through his wealth than through anyone else's.

And about that day, Allah sent down words that al-Abbas would carry for the rest of his life:

Prophet, tell those you have taken captive, 'If God knows of any good in your hearts, He will give you something better than what has been taken from you, and He will forgive you: God is forgiving and merciful.'

QUR'AN 8:70

Al-Abbas understood the verse was about him. By Allah, he would say, I knew it was true. In place of the gold that was taken from me, Allah gave me far more, twenty servants, each with wealth in his hands, who went out and increased my fortune. And as for the forgiveness, he would add, I am still waiting and hoping for the forgiveness of Allah. He had given what was taken, and trusted the promise that what is surrendered to Allah is never lost.

The family brought home

After Badr he could no longer be forced out against the Prophet ﷺ, and he held himself back from every battle on the wrong side. When the conquest of Makkah approached and al-Abbas set out to migrate so he could earn the full reward, the Prophet ﷺ met him on the road and told him: you are to me as the seal of the migrants, just as I am the seal of the prophets. He had negotiated the Hijrah out of Makkah; now he negotiated the return into it, the peaceful reconciliation with the very family who had cast the Prophet ﷺ out. The man who had sent him away was the man who brought him home.

Not all the Ansar understood at first why this latecomer was so honoured, and more than once the Prophet ﷺ had to correct them, and his words were severe with love. What is it with people who hurt me by hurting my uncle? Whoever harms al-Abbas has harmed me. He is what remains of my forefathers; honour him. And in another narration, the heaviest of all: by Allah, faith will not enter a man's heart until he loves al-Abbas for the sake of Allah and for my sake, because he is my kin.

At the Battle of Hunayn, when the Muslims were scattered in the first shock and many fled, it was al-Abbas who held the reins of the Prophet's mount and stayed, and it was that great voice of his that the Prophet ﷺ told him to raise. He called the fleeing men back: come back, he is the Messenger of Allah. And the army turned, and rallied around the Prophet ﷺ, and the day was won. The gift Allah had placed in him in the days of ignorance now served the religion.

In Madinah at last, the Prophet ﷺ built a home for him beside his own. Our mother Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) said she never saw anyone the Prophet ﷺ honoured or loved more than

al-Abbas. He would keep him close, kiss his forehead, place him again and again on that pedestal of a father, and pray that Allah forgive al-Abbas and his children with a forgiveness that leaves no sin behind, the hidden and the open. And his children were many, more than fifteen, among them Abdullah ibn Abbas, the boy who slept in the Prophet's house and shadowed him and became the great scholar of the ummah. The family was whole again, and the Prophet ﷺ kept it close until the end.

The most honoured man in Madinah

When the Prophet ﷺ passed, al-Abbas helped wash his body, and then he became the anchor of the household that remained. Ali himself, it is narrated, would kiss the hands and feet of al-Abbas, saying, O my uncle, be pleased with me. And the two great caliphs honoured him in ways almost hard to picture. Umar gave the veterans of Badr a stipend, and to al-Abbas more than them all. Once Umar and Uthman, seeing al-Abbas approach on the road, dismounted from their camels, unwilling to sit higher than him as he passed.

And in the year of the great famine, when the rains would not come and people were dying, Umar did something that has echoed ever since. He gathered the people for the prayer for rain and brought al-Abbas forward, and he said: O Allah, when our Prophet ﷺ was among us and drought struck, we would draw near to You through him. Now our Prophet is gone, and we draw near to You through the uncle of our Prophet, so give us rain. Al-Abbas wept and made du'a, Umar made du'a, and the rain came and filled Madinah and the valleys around it as they had not seen since the days of the Prophet ﷺ. A grandson of Abu Lahab, of all people, a believer named after this same al-Abbas, stood there

and put it into verse: that by his uncle, Allah had given water to the people of Hijaz.

His passing

He lived in Madinah for more than two decades after the Prophet ﷺ, the last living warmth of a father everyone had loved. He died in the time of Uthman, soon after his wife Umm al-Fadl, at eighty-six. And when the people of Madinah heard that the uncle of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ had died, they poured in from every direction until the city was overwhelmed. It may have been the largest funeral of any companion ever buried in Madinah. The crowds pressing to carry him, to touch him one last time, became so dense that they could not get him to the grave; Uthman had to send men to push the people back from Banu Hashim so that the family could finally lay him down. Even his burial was a measure of his honour.

His son Abdullah, drowning in grief beside the grave, was approached by a bedouin who said something he never forgot: what awaits you now, as a reward for grieving your father, is better for you than your father was; and what Allah will be for al-Abbas now is greater than anything you could ever be for him. His lineage spread across the Muslim world, and from it came the long Abbasid line. But the title that mattered was never a dynasty. It was the one the Prophet ﷺ gave him: al-Abbas, the uncle of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

What al-Abbas's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read the life of al-Abbas and feel only the warmth of it, the honour heaped on a beloved old man. But there is a sharper question buried in his story, and it is about what Allah sees.

For years al-Abbas carried something the world could not read. He loved the Prophet ﷺ, he defended him, he believed, perhaps, long before he said so, and yet outwardly he stood in an ambiguous place, even on the wrong side of a battlefield. The Prophet ﷺ would not bend the visible ruling for him, because justice is justice. But Allah was not fooled for a moment. If God knows of any good in your hearts, the verse says, He will give you something better. Al-Abbas lived to see that promise kept twice over, in wealth restored and forgiveness hoped for. Here is what that asks of you: stop performing your faith for people who can only see the outside, and start tending the part of your heart that only Allah can see. The good He is looking for is not the good others applaud. It is the sincerity, the ikhlas, that you keep between yourself and Him, the intention no one will ever verify. Al-Abbas's whole reward turned on what was inside him. So will yours.

Then notice what he did with what was taken from him. They stripped his gold at Badr, and he did not grasp after it or grow bitter; he let it go, trusted the promise, and watched Allah return it multiplied. Later, when the Prophet ﷺ abolished the usury he was owed and encouraged him to forgive even the principal, al-Abbas forgave it, for the sake of a shade on the Day of Judgment. This is contentment with Allah's decree turned into action: the conviction that nothing surrendered to Allah is ever truly lost, that what the world calls a loss He may be recording as the very thing that saves you. When something is taken from you, money, comfort, a plan you loved, his life asks whether you can open your hand the way he did, certain that the One who took it has something better.

And there is the great voice. Allah gave him a gift that could have been mere vanity in a shallow society, and at Hunayn he turned it

toward the Prophet ﷺ and called a fleeing army back to the truth. You have been given something too: a skill, a presence, a means, a circle of people who will hear you. The question is the same one his life puts to all of us. Will you spend your gift on yourself, or raise it, the way he raised his voice, in the service of what Allah loves? Do one concrete thing with it today, for Allah alone: use your means to bring someone back toward Him, forgive a debt no one will know you forgave, give in a silence only He will witness.

The quality to take from al-Abbas is this: to live for the eyes of Allah and not the eyes of men, and to trust that He sees and keeps every hidden good. It is a quiet, unglamorous faith, the faith of a careful man, and it is open to anyone. May Allah be pleased with al-Abbas, the uncle of His Messenger ﷺ, reward the good he kept hidden in his heart, and grant us the sincerity to live for His sight alone, until He gathers us in the company of His Prophet ﷺ and his household and his companions.

This chapter follows the account of al-Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (8:70). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

The Muslim Family of Abu Lahab

Whom Allah Guided After the Father of the Flame

There is a house in Makkah that shared a wall with the house of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Not a house down the street, not a house in the same quarter, but a house pressed against his own, close enough that the family inside could hear him stand in prayer at night beside Khadijah. The man who lived there was his uncle, almost a father to him, the one who had wept for joy on the day he was born. And from behind that wall would come some of the cruelest hands ever raised against the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

This is the story of that house. But it is not, in the end, a story about its master. It is a story about the children he tried to drag down with him, and about a Lord who reached into the most cursed family in Makkah and pulled out believers, martyrs, and bearers of the Qur'an. He guides whom He wills, even from the household of the only enemy He named by name.

The man behind the wall

His name was not Abu Lahab. His name was Abd al-Uzza ibn Abd al-Muttalib, the slave of the idol al-Uzza, and he was the uncle of the Prophet ﷺ, about twenty years older than him, old enough to stand in a father's place. He does not fit the image the films give him. He was strikingly handsome, so handsome that travellers who came into Makkah and watched him doing his ugliest work were still struck by his appearance. He was intelligent, wealthy,

well dressed, a man of Banu Hashim with lineage and standing and a famous cloak from Aden. He was known for his generosity to the pilgrims, though it was the generosity of a man who wanted to be seen.

They called him Abu Lahab, the father of the flame, long before any revelation, because his cheeks were reddish and his face seemed to glow. The Arabs admired that glow. It was a brightness, but not the brightness of faith. When he rejected the Prophet ﷺ, his name did not change so much as deepen into something terrible: the father of the flame became the father of another flame.

His love for the Prophet ﷺ was once real. When Abu Lahab's beloved brother Abdullah died young, leaving Aminah pregnant, the grief was Abu Lahab's too, for the two brothers had grown up close. And when the boy was born, it was the servant Thuwaybah (may Allah be pleased with her) who carried the news to Abu Lahab that his nephew had come into the world. Out of sheer joy, he freed her on the spot. He saw the child as a living extension of the brother he had lost. He became his neighbour, his partner in trade, and arranged for two of his own sons to marry two of the Prophet's daughters. By every appearance, two families were knitting themselves together for life.

His wife was Umm Jamil, Arwa bint Harb, the sister of Abu Sufyan ibn Harb. The marriages, the shared wall, the daughters promised: all of it pointed toward something beautiful. And then the Prophet ﷺ climbed the hill of Safa and called his people to one God.

The day a single answer changed everything

The Prophet ﷺ called out as a man cries warning of an approaching army, and his relatives gathered around Safa to hear what could be so grave. He told them the truth he had brought. These were people who, moments before, had affirmed that he was the trustworthy one, the honest one. Among them stood Abu Lahab, his neighbour, the man who was to become the father-in-law of his two daughters.

It is hard to overstate how much hung on what the elders said next. When whole tribes later entered Islam, the younger ones looked to their seniors first. Had Abu Lahab said, my blood is your blood, my wealth is your wealth, go forth and we believe you, the history of that hill would read differently. Instead he answered with the lowest curse his society had: may you perish, O Muhammad. Is this what you gathered us for? The air went out of the gathering. The crowd drained away from the Prophet ﷺ, and only a child, Ali (may Allah be pleased with him), stayed and said, I will follow you, O Messenger of Allah.

Abu Lahab rejected him on the calculation of a merchant. We sell these gods, he reasoned, the pilgrims pay for them, everyone profits from these idols, and you want to collapse them all into one invisible God. It is a poor business decision. Think of him not as a snarling villain but as a man in a fine suit who has run the numbers and does not like them. When the Prophet ﷺ spoke of the reward to come, Abu Lahab blew across his open palms and said he saw nothing of what was promised, that it was as empty as his empty hands. He once asked what he would receive if he accepted Islam, and when the Prophet ﷺ told him he would receive what every Muslim receives, he recoiled at the thought of standing level with ordinary men. From that day, the abuse began.

The cruelty from behind the wall

It started with words and grew into something physical. When the Prophet ﷺ fell ill and could not stand for the night prayer for a night or two, Umm Jamil, who had been close enough to hear his recitation stop, came to mock him: where is that devil of yours that descends on you? It seems your demon has abandoned you. And in answer to her sneer came the gentle oath of Surah ad-Duha, that his Lord had done no such thing.

By the morning brightness and by the night when it grows still, your Lord has not forsaken you [Prophet], nor does He hate you,

QUR'AN 93:1-3

When insults failed, they turned to filth and to blood. Umm Jamil earned a second name, the carrier of firewood, for what she did. She would lay sharp thorns and spikes outside his door so that he had to step over them each time he left his home. She and Abu Lahab would gather the entrails and waste of slaughtered animals and pile them at his door, and in one account fix them above it, so that when he opened his own door the filth would fall on him. This was his uncle. This was his aunt. It is narrated that she would loop a rope set with thorns around his neck and drag at it until it marked the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

The Prophet ﷺ appealed to whatever was left of their decency. What kind of neighbour is this, O Banu Abd al-Muttalib? he asked. You are a people who claim to honour your neighbours. Is this how a neighbour is treated? His other uncles, Abu Talib, al-Abbas, Hamza, were not yet Muslim, but even they were ashamed, for this was a disgrace to the family. Once Hamza, before he had accepted Islam, found the Prophet ﷺ complaining of the filth at his door, gathered it up, and threw it back onto Abu

Lahab. Abu Lahab only muttered that his nephew Hamza had gone mad, and then he turned on his own brothers, declaring that he washed his hands of all of them: I free myself from him, I free myself from you.

Then he went to his sons. He told them his head was forbidden to their heads, that he disowned them, that their very lineage was severed, unless they divorced the two daughters of Muhammad ﷺ.

The two sons and the broken engagements

The elder son, Utbah, was engaged to Ruqayyah. He was close to the Prophet ﷺ in age and seems to have hesitated, which is why his father pressed him so hard. In the end he divorced Ruqayyah, and though no narration records cruelty in the manner of it, the wound to the Prophet ﷺ was deep, for he was a father who loved his daughters and had chosen these men believing he was securing their future.

The second son was Utaybah, and his name must be remembered. He was engaged to Umm Kulthum, and he made a spectacle of the divorce. He walked up to the Prophet ﷺ in public, his own father-in-law, and announced that he disbelieved in his religion, mocking the verses of the Qur'an as he did it. He said he was separating himself from his daughter, that there was no love between them. Then he tore the Prophet's shirt and spat at him. To this man, and almost never to anyone, the Prophet ﷺ raised a supplication against him: O Allah, set upon him a dog from among Your dogs.

There was a third broken engagement, less often counted. The Prophet's adopted son, then known as Zaid ibn Muhammad ﷺ, had been engaged to Abu Lahab's daughter Durrah, and that too

was broken off. Three engagements shattered in one house, all meant to harm him.

And here the wisdom turns, the way it so often does. Those two daughters, Ruqayyah and Umm Kulthum, were not buried in that grim family. The Prophet ﷺ married them, one after the other, to Uthman ibn Affan (may Allah be pleased with him), a man more handsome, more noble, more generous than any son of Abu Lahab. Ruqayyah made the migration to Abyssinia at his side. Whoever leaves something for the sake of Allah, Allah replaces it with what is better. What looked like humiliation was Allah lifting two of His believing women out of a doomed house and placing them beside one of the finest of His servants.

The endings that mirrored the cruelty

No one in this family left the world quietly. Abu Lahab did not fight at Badr; he was too shrewd for that, and sent another man in his place to settle a debt. He waited in Makkah, certain the affair was finished. Then the news came back. A freed servant named Abu Rafi (may Allah be pleased with him), who was secretly a believer, was sitting nearby when Abu Sufyan ibn al-Harith described the rout: a small band of men they could not overpower, and with them great riders in white that filled the horizon, who struck and could not be struck. In his joy Abu Rafi blurted out, by Allah, those were the angels. Abu Lahab fell on him and beat him with both fists, until a woman of the household, Lubabah (may Allah be pleased with her), struck Abu Lahab's head with a tent pole and split it open.

Seven days later that wound festered. His body began to rot with an infection so frightening that his own family abandoned him, quarantining him for fear it would spread. The man who had forced the Prophet ﷺ into loneliness died alone. His corpse

stank so badly that his children would not approach it for three days, until shamed relatives sent servants to drag the body to a place outside the town, where they buried him by pelting him with stones from a distance, just as he had once pelted the Prophet ﷺ with stones.

Utaybah, the son who tore the shirt and spat, set out on a trade journey to Syria. His father, fearing the Prophet's supplication, made the men surround him and sleep around him through the nights, which tells you that they knew exactly what they were rejecting. At Zarqa, in what is today Jordan, a lion came in the dark, passed over every sleeping man, and went straight to Utaybah. He cried out, Muhammad has killed me, and he is in Makkah and I am in Syria. The body that had assaulted the Prophet ﷺ was torn apart.

Umm Jamil too was found dead with that same thorned rope at her own throat, strangled as she had tried to strangle him. Three people from one house, each ending mirroring the harm they had done. And yet the worse punishment, the real one, waits beyond this world. Years later al-Abbas saw his brother Abu Lahab in a dream, in a terrible state, and asked him what he had found. Abu Lahab answered that he had known no relief since leaving the world, except a small drink of water on account of the day he freed Thuwaybah at the Prophet's birth. One act of honouring the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and even in the Fire it was not wasted on him.

Whom Allah guided

Now look at that same household again, and watch Allah work. Almost every child of Abu Lahab became Muslim.

The first was his daughter, Durrah (may Allah be pleased with her), and she is counted among the early believers and the migrants. After Zaid, she had been married to a man who fought the Prophet ﷺ at Badr and died there, leaving her with children. While the rest of Makkah seethed for revenge, Durrah said simply, I knew he was a prophet, I knew he was a prophet, and she gathered her children and made the migration to Madinah alone. Imagine the believers watching the daughter of Abu Lahab walk into their city. Some of the women began to whisper, and one group asked her to her face: are you the daughter of Abu Lahab, the one of whom Allah said, may his hands be ruined? What good is your migration to you? She went weeping to the Prophet ﷺ, and he rose in anger, the anger he kept for moments like this, prayed with the people, then stood on the pulpit and told them plainly that his intercession reaches his family so long as they believe, and that no living person should be hurt on account of someone who has died. Then he married her to one of the most beautiful of his companions, the man whose form the angel Jibril would sometimes take. Her mother had once sneered, where is your devil that descends on you, meaning Jibril; her daughter was given in marriage to the man Jibril resembled.

The two sons came in at the conquest of Makkah. The Prophet ﷺ looked around the gathering and asked al-Abbas where his two nephews Utbah and Mu'attab were, for he did not see them, and they had fled to the edges of the city expecting his vengeance. He sent for them. They came riding fast, half in fear and half in hope, and what happened next is one of the tenderest scenes in his life. He walked out between them, took both their hands, and walked with them in conversation for a long while, all the way to the wall of the Kaaba, putting them at ease, his face afterward full of joy. He told al-Abbas that he had asked his Lord

to grant him these two cousins, and Allah had granted them. He let Mu'attab keep the very house he had seized, the house of revelation, the house of Khadijah. At Hunayn, when others fled, Utbah and Mu'attab stood firm beside him, and Mu'attab lost an eye in that battle and wore a patch for the rest of his life. The other daughters embraced Islam as well.

And the inheritance did not stop with them. Mu'attab named his sons Abdullah, and Muhammad, and Musa, and Ubaydullah. From the descendants of Abu Lahab came scholars and narrators of hadith, every one of them a memoriser of the Qur'an, who recited and taught the very chapter that names and condemns their forefather. There is a chain that runs: al-Qasim ibn al-Abbas ibn Muhammad ibn Mu'attab ibn Abi Lahab, the names of the Prophet's own son and uncle now carried by the offspring of his enemy. Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) once separated two of Abu Lahab's children who were quarrelling and called them what he earned, explaining that when Allah said his wealth and what he earned would not help him, the earnings included his children.

May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he be ruined too! Neither his wealth nor his gains will help him: he will burn in the Flaming Fire and so will his wife, the firewood-carrier, with a palm-fibre rope around her neck.

QUR'AN 111:1-5

He took pride in his wealth, and his wealth did nothing for him. He took pride in his children, and his children became Muslim, learned his humiliation by heart, and taught it to their children. Had he only believed, all of them would have been his continuing charity, his legacy, his share in the intercession of the Prophet

ﷺ. He chose to be the one enemy Allah named, and his own descendants became the ones who recite that name in prayer.

What this family asks of our faith

It would be easy to read this story for its drama, the rotting body, the lion in the night, the rope at the throat, and to walk away having felt something and learned nothing. That would be a loss. This household is not a horror tale. It is a set of questions put directly to our own iman.

The first is about what we inherit and what we choose. Abu Lahab was the closest thing the Prophet ﷺ had to a father, and he was lost. His children grew up behind the same wall, watched the same cruelty, carried the same blood, and Allah guided them anyway. No one is condemned by their lineage, their family's sins, or the reputation they were born into. If Allah guided believers out of the house of the man He named in the Qur'an, then no background you carry, no parent's wrongdoing, no past of your own, places you beyond His mercy. The door is open while you breathe. Durrah walked through it alone, with children on her hip and a cursed name behind her, because she trusted that Allah's promise was larger than her father's disgrace. Trust Him like that. Do not let shame over where you come from keep you from running, as she ran, toward Him.

The second is about what lasts. Abu Lahab spent his life converting everything into profit and leverage, and it all turned to nothing the moment the angels appeared at Badr. His money could not post his bail from the Fire, as he had boasted it would. And the single thing that gave him even a drop of relief in his torment was not a coin he ever earned but a moment of honour he showed the Messenger of Allah ﷺ at his birth. Weigh your own days against that. The things you accumulate for status, the

leverage you think you are building, will not buy you one drop of water on the Day you need it. But one sincere act done for the sake of Allah, one kindness, one honouring of His Prophet's way, is never wasted, not even in the Fire, not even for an enemy. So do something today that earns nothing in this world: a prayer no one sees, a charity you tell no one about, a moment of patience held quietly for His sake alone. That is the currency that survives.

The quality to take from this family is the faith of Durrah and of the two sons who came riding back in fear and were met with two hands reaching for theirs. They had every reason to assume they were beyond welcome, and the Prophet ﷺ walked between them and put them at ease, because mercy was greater in him than memory of harm. That is how Allah deals with the one who turns back to Him. He does not greet the returning servant with the ledger of his family or his past; He takes him by both hands. Live with hope in that mercy, and extend it to others: refuse to define a person by a dead relative's sins, or by their own worst day, the way the Prophet ﷺ refused to let his community define Durrah.

May Allah be pleased with Durrah, and Utbah, and Mu'attab, and all whom He guided out of that house. May He free us, as He freed them, from the names and the failures we were born into, gather us among those who honour His Prophet ﷺ, and let no good we do for His sake, however small and however hidden, ever be lost.

This chapter follows the account of the family of Abu Lahab in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (93:1-3, 111:1-5).

Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Hakim ibn Hizam

The Man Who Let Go of the World

There is a kind of person the world is built to reward and a kind of test that the world is too busy to notice it is failing. Hakim ibn Hizam (may Allah be pleased with him) was, for the first sixty years of his life, exactly the man everyone admired: born into nobility, rich beyond most, sharp in business, generous with the poor, beloved by his people. He had everything the streets of Makkah taught a man to want. And he very nearly lost the one thing that mattered, not through hatred of the truth, but through something quieter and more dangerous: he was simply too occupied to stop and consider it.

His is a story for anyone Allah has blessed with means. It is the story of a man who spent half his life chasing wealth and the second half learning, from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself, that the hand which gives is better than the hand which takes. By the end, he had become the richest man in Madinah and the one most desperate to give it all away.

A son of a noble house

Hakim ibn Hizam ibn Khuwaylid carried in his very name a thread that ties him to the heart of this story. Khuwaylid was the father of our mother Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her). That makes Hakim her paternal nephew, and in the way those societies understood family, a nephew was as a son and an aunt

was as a mother. Khadijah was, in effect, a mother to him. The Prophet ﷺ, who married her, became to Hakim something like an older brother, a man already in the family and already loved.

His grandfather Khuwaylid was a chief of Banu Asad, one of the custodians of Makkah, a man whose standing in the city sat close to that of Abdul Muttalib himself. The two of them had once travelled together to Yemen to congratulate the ruler who succeeded Abraha after Allah turned back the assault on the Kaaba. Their children married into one another's houses: Khuwaylid's son al-Awwam married Safiyyah, the aunt of the Prophet ﷺ, and from that union came az-Zubair ibn al-Awwam, who would be Hakim's first cousin. This was a family of wealth, of honour, of clean reputation, people not known for cruelty or for harming others. Khadijah was the finest flower of that lineage. Hakim came from the same soil.

His birth carried a sign. His mother, Umm Hakim, entered the Kaaba one day among a group of women, and there, inside the sacred House, her labour came upon her so suddenly that she could not leave. So Hakim ibn Hizam was born inside the Kaaba itself. It is an authentic report, and it marked him from his first breath as a man destined for some honour Allah would one day bestow on him. Imagine it: a child whose first moment of life happened within the four walls toward which the world turns in prayer.

Wealth, wisdom, and a closed door

Hakim grew into the promise of his birth. He was a merchant, and a gifted one. "I used to be a trader," he said of himself. "I would go out to Yemen and to Syria, and I would make great profit." Travel then was not a flight booked in an afternoon; the roads to Yemen and Greater Syria were long and punishing, the same

routes whose hardship had touched the family of the Prophet ﷺ deeply. A man who walked them every year was a man who was always on the road, always trading, rarely still.

And like his aunt Khadijah, he gave. When he came back from his journeys, he said, he would spend his profit on the poor of his tribe. Khadijah had been famous for it, a marked tent before her home where the needy knew they would be helped. Hakim shared that spirit, perhaps not to her towering measure, but unmistakably the same instinct: earn much, and give it to those who have little.

He was wise, too, and his name, Hakim, means exactly that. It is reported that no one was permitted to enter Dar an-Nadwa, the assembly house of Makkah where the city's decisions were made, to offer an opinion until he had reached forty years of age. The single exception was Hakim ibn Hizam. He was admitted and his counsel was sought when he was only fifteen. The wealth, the lineage, the intelligence, the good character: everything was laid out before him like a road that led straight to faith.

But there is arrogance, and there is ego, and then there is a third thing that is harder to see and easier to excuse. There is indifference. There is the man so consumed by his work and his routes and his markets that the question of religion never quite rises to the top of his thoughts. He was not an enemy of the Prophet ﷺ. He bore him no hatred. He simply was not interested, and he was barely in Makkah long enough to be asked. This was the quiet illness of Hakim ibn Hizam: not hostility, but a heart too crowded with the dunya to make room.

The food in the night

Yet love does not vanish because faith is delayed. Hakim still loved his aunt Khadijah, who had been as a mother to him. So when Quraysh imposed their cruel boycott on Banu Hashim and Banu Muttalib, herding the Prophet's clan into a barren valley and cutting them off from food and trade, Hakim could not simply look away.

He came to it as family, not as a believer. He did not care for the dispute over idols or the call to a new religion. He saw his people starving, he saw his aunt among them, and he knew it was wrong. So he would take grain and food and goods, load them onto camels in the dark, and drive the animals toward the valley of Banu Hashim. He smuggled in what he could under cover of night.

And here the nobility of Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her) shines through one more time. She had never been required to suffer the boycott at all. She belonged to a different clan and could have remained in comfort. She chose the valley to be beside her husband ﷺ, and that choice would cost her her health and, in the end, her life. When her nephew's secret food reached her, she did not keep it. She distributed it among the others in the valley. Hakim wanted to feed Khadijah; Khadijah wanted to feed the believers. The food he sent for one woman fed a whole suffering community.

The years he would later weep over

Did Hakim ever stand against the Prophet ﷺ? In a way, and it haunted him afterward. He was present at the Battle of Badr, brought out, like a few others, by his people rather than by his own desire to fight. The Prophet ﷺ said of some who were dragged to that battlefield that they had no wish to fight the Muslims at all. There is no record of Hakim carrying a sword or

striking a blow. But he was there, on the wrong side, and that nearness to disbelief terrified him once he understood what it had nearly cost him.

After he became Muslim, when he wished to swear an oath, he would say: "By the One who saved me from being killed on the Day of Badr." He understood the mercy in it plainly. Had he died that day, he would have died a disbeliever, an enemy to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. His son later recalled finding him weeping in his old age over those years, over how he could ever have stood at Badr against the Prophet ﷺ, and swearing he would never raise a hand against him again.

There is something tender, too, from before his Islam. He once travelled to Madinah simply to bring the Prophet ﷺ a gift, not as a follower, but as an old friend. "Muhammad ﷺ was the most beloved of people to me in the days of ignorance," he said. He had bought a fine garment from Yemen, a robe of royalty, for fifty dinars, and he thought it befitting the man he loved. The Prophet ﷺ declined to accept it as a gift. He did not refuse harshly; he refused with care, because to take a present from a man still in opposition might muddy the purity of the call, might look like something bought and sold. When Hakim insisted he would not leave until it was taken, the Prophet ﷺ said simply, "Then sell it to me," and bought it from him. It is said the Prophet ﷺ later wore that very robe on the pulpit, and that those who saw him said they had never seen anything more beautiful.

When the day came that the Prophet ﷺ advanced upon Makkah for its conquest, he named a small handful of men of whom he said, in effect, that polytheism was beneath them, that they were too noble and too intelligent for it to make any sense that they still clung to it. Hakim ibn Hizam was one of those four. The Prophet

ﷺ clearly meant to draw them in, not to punish them. On the day Makkah was opened, the Prophet ﷺ declared that whoever entered the house of Hakim ibn Hizam would be safe, just as he had said of Abu Sufyan, an honour and a softening of the heart toward a man who had never truly been his foe. And on that day, at last, Hakim ibn Hizam embraced Islam, and his wife and his children embraced it with him. The whole household came home together.

"Wealth is green and sweet"

When a person enters Islam, we tell them that their past sins are wiped away. Hakim came to the Prophet ﷺ with the opposite worry. He had spent a lifetime doing good, and he wanted to know what became of it. "O Messenger of Allah," he asked, "those things I used to do as acts of devotion in the days of ignorance, keeping the ties of kinship, freeing slaves, giving charity, do I have any reward for them?" And the Prophet ﷺ gave him an answer that must have lifted a weight from his chest: "You have embraced Islam along with all the good you did before it." The good was not lost. It was preserved, purified, carried forward into his new life.

The scale of that good was extraordinary. His great-nephew Urwah ibn az-Zubair, the great narrator of the Prophet's life, reported that Hakim had freed one hundred slaves and given one hundred camels in charity in the days of ignorance, and then freed another hundred slaves and gave another hundred camels after he became Muslim. All of it now accepted by Allah.

But the deepest lesson of his life came at the Battle of Hunayn. There the Prophet ﷺ was distributing the spoils, giving generously to the newly converted of Makkah to soften and steady their hearts. Hakim asked for a share, and the Prophet ﷺ

gave him. He asked again, and was given again. He asked a third time, and was given a third time. And then the Prophet ﷺ turned to him, not as a stranger but as a man who had grown up alongside him, and gave him the counsel of a lifetime.

"O Hakim," he said, "this wealth is green and sweet." It looks evergreen and tastes pleasant, irresistible to the eye and the tongue. "Whoever takes it without greed in his soul will be blessed in it, and whoever takes it with greed in his soul will not be blessed in it, and will be like one who eats and is never full." Then he added the line that would reshape the rest of Hakim's days: "The upper hand is better than the lower hand," the giving hand better than the receiving hand. "And whoever seeks to be self-sufficient, Allah will make him self-sufficient."

That description of wealth, green and lush and then suddenly gone, runs straight through the Qur'an's portrait of the life of this world:

Bear in mind that the present life is just a game, a diversion, an attraction, a cause of boasting among you, of rivalry in wealth and children. It is like plants that spring up after the rain: their growth at first delights the sowers, but then you see them wither away, turn yellow, and become stubble. There is terrible punishment in the next life as well as forgiveness and approval from God; the life of this world is only an illusory pleasure.

QUR'AN 57:20

Hakim was now in his seventies, a man who had looked at money one way for his entire life. And in a single conversation, everything turned. "O Messenger of Allah," he answered, "by the One who sent you with the truth, I will never ask anyone for

anything again as long as I live." From this hand, the giving hand, he would live. From the other hand, the asking hand, never again.

The hand that only gave

He kept his word with a stubbornness that bewildered even the rightly guided. When Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) called Hakim forward to take his rightful share from the public treasury, Hakim refused it. When Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) called him, he refused again. Umar, unwilling to meet Allah having withheld a Muslim's due, grew so troubled that he gathered the people and said, "I call you to witness that I offered Hakim his share and he would not take it." Hakim took nothing he had not earned with his own hands in the marketplace, and he remained that way until the day he died.

His business, blessed by the Prophet's own supplication, never failed him. Once the Prophet ﷺ had given him a single dinar to buy a sacrificial animal; Hakim bought a sheep for it, sold that sheep for two dinars, bought another sheep for one, and returned to the Prophet ﷺ with both the sheep and a dinar. The Prophet ﷺ prayed that Allah would bless him in his trade, and so He did. Much of what Muslims know about honest dealing comes through Hakim: that you must not sell what you do not yet possess, that buyer and seller who are truthful and clear with one another will find blessing in their trade, and that lying and concealment strip every blessing away. The first thing a person is asked about their wealth on the Day of Judgement is how they earned it and how they spent it, and Hakim ibn Hizam spent his second life getting both answers right.

He lived to be one hundred and twenty years old, by the report in Bukhari and Muslim, half his life in ignorance and half in Islam, perhaps the longest-lived of all the companions. He became the

richest man in the Madinah of the Prophet ﷺ, and the one who gave the most. When his cousin az-Zubair died owing an enormous debt, near a million, Hakim went to az-Zubair's son and said, "I will take half of it," half a million, lifted from a grieving family by a man who said, "I do not wake to a single day in which I find someone in need at my door, except that I know Allah is testing me, and I seek His reward for it."

There is one scene to hold above the rest. On the Day of Arafah, Hakim ibn Hizam bought the freedom of every enslaved person he could find within his sight, a hundred souls set free, and brought forward a hundred camels and a hundred sheep for sacrifice. Two hundred animals from one man, and a hundred people weeping with the joy of freedom, and Hakim himself raising his hands to the sky, tears running down his face: "O Allah, free our necks from the Fire. O Allah, free our necks from the Fire." And the people who watched began to weep with him, and some of them prayed aloud: "O Allah, this is Your servant. He has freed Your servants, and we are Your servants, so free us. You are more merciful to us than Hakim is."

When he died, peacefully in his bed in Madinah, his son Hisham reported his last words. He said, "There is no god but Allah. I used to fear You, and today I have hope in You. There is no god but Allah. I used to fear You, and today I have hope in You." Born in the Kaaba, buried in al-Baqi beside the companions of the Prophet ﷺ, he closed a life of giving with a whisper of hope in the One to whom he had given it all.

What Hakim's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read Hakim's story as a lesson about money and stop there, to admire a wealthy man's generosity and move

on. But his life puts a sharper question to us, and it begins long before the charity.

For sixty years, Hakim was not a bad man. He was a generous, noble, intelligent man who simply never made room in his crowded life for the one thing that mattered most. He was not an enemy of the truth; he was indifferent to it, too busy on the road, too absorbed in the next trade. That is the danger most likely to take a comfortable person today. Not hatred of faith, but distraction from it. Ask yourself honestly whether your iman has become one more thing you will get to once the work settles, once the season passes, once life is less full. Hakim nearly let the whole thing slip through that gap, and he wept in his old age for the years he lost. Do not wait for the conquest of Makkah to take Allah seriously. Take Him seriously now, while the road is still long.

Then learn what he learned from the Prophet ﷺ about the dunya: that it is green and sweet, that it looks evergreen and tastes pleasant precisely so that it can take hold of the heart. Hakim's greatness was not that he was poor; he was the richest man in Madinah. His greatness was that he held wealth in an open hand. He took it without greed, gave it without counting, and refused to let it own him. The quality to imitate is not poverty. It is detachment, holding what Allah gives you loosely, ready to give it for His sake, never letting it become the thing you live and die for. You do not have to free a hundred slaves on Arafah. You have to give one thing, today, that costs you something, for Allah alone, and feel your grip on the dunya loosen by that much.

And notice where his contentment came from. The Prophet ﷺ told him, "Whoever seeks to be self-sufficient, Allah will make him self-sufficient." Hakim believed that promise so completely

that he refused his rightful share from two khalifahs and trusted Allah to provide through his own hands instead. That is the heart of tawakkul: to believe that what Allah has written for you will reach you, so you never need to grasp, never need to compromise, never need to take from the lower hand. When you trust Allah's provision like that, your dignity stops depending on people and starts resting on Him.

His final words are the whole journey in one breath: "I used to fear You, and today I have hope in You." A believer lives between those two, fearing Allah enough to give and to guard against greed, hoping in Allah enough to let go of the world and lean entirely on Him. Hakim spent half a life with a heart too full of the dunya to find room for his Lord, and the other half emptying his hands so he could meet Him unburdened. May Allah be pleased with Hakim ibn Hizam, free our necks from the Fire as he longed for his to be freed, loosen our grip on this fading world, and let us come to Him as he did, in fear turned at last to hope.

This chapter follows the account of Hakim ibn Hizam (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (57:20). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Amina bint Wahb and Halima al-Sa'diyya

The Mothers Who Cradled the Mercy

There is a moment in the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that almost no one in his lifetime knew about, and that he himself rarely spoke of. He was past sixty, the leader of a people, surrounded by companions who would have given their lives for him in an instant. They were walking a hard road outside Madinah when, without explanation, he turned off the path and began to climb through broken terrain. No one dared ask him where he was going. They simply gathered close and followed, mile after mile, in silence. At last he stopped at a quiet, gently marked grave, and he wept until his beard was wet with tears, and every man around him wept too, not one of them knowing whose grave it was. It was his mother's. He had not seen it in over fifty years.

To understand that grief, and the gentleness it produced, you have to go back to the beginning, to two women who carried him before the world ever knew his name. One gave him life and lost her own too soon. The other took him in when no one else would, and was repaid in a way she could never have imagined. Their names were Amina bint Wahb (may Allah be pleased with her) and Halima al-Sa'diyya (may Allah be pleased with her), and their two stories are woven through the childhood of the most beloved of all creation.

A marriage of a few days

Amina bint Wahb was a young woman of noble blood. Her father, Wahb, was a chief of Banu Zuhrah, one of the honoured houses of Quraysh. When Abd al-Muttalib, the chief of Banu Hashim, sought a wife for his youngest son Abdullah, the very son who had just been spared from sacrifice through the mercy of Allah, he chose Amina. So two chiefs married off their two young children. Abdullah was just past twenty, Amina still a teenager. They were, by every measure, at the very start of their lives together.

It did not last. Within weeks of the marriage, perhaps a few months at most, Abdullah set out on the summer trade caravan to ash-Sham. He left before he could even learn that his wife was carrying a child. Consider that for a moment: this young man had no idea what role he was playing in history. He rode away from a woman he thought was simply his bride, not knowing that the greatest of Allah's creation was already in her womb.

On the way home, somewhere near Yathrib, the city that would one day be Madinah, Abdullah fell ill. He did not realise the sickness was fatal. Not wanting to slow the caravan that was so eager to reach Makkah, he told his people to go ahead while he stayed with some uncles until he recovered. He never recovered. He died there, and no one to this day knows where his grave lies. The father of the Prophet ﷺ rests somewhere in the soil of the very city that would one day receive his son as a refuge.

The news travelled slowly. Amina waited for the caravan and asked after her husband. They told her he was a little sick, recovering, that he would come soon. Weeks later came the truth: he was gone. She had been a wife for, in some accounts, as few as four days. Now she was a widow, poor, with a child on

the way who would enter the world already fatherless. Abdullah had never had the chance to earn anything. He left her a few camels, a small number of goats, and one servant, a woman named Baraka, known to history as Umm Ayman, who would go on to help raise the Prophet ﷺ and to love him to the end of her long life.

Born an orphan in a hard world

The aging Abd al-Muttalib stepped in as best he could. Near the end of his own life, he gathered the child to himself and refused to let him be overlooked. He gave him a name no one else in Makkah carried: Muhammad. When asked why, he said he wanted the boy to be praised in the heavens and on the earth. A child meant for praise, not a burden on the family.

But the world he was born into did not see it that way. In that society, no one was more exposed to neglect and exploitation than the orphan, who could be put to the hardest work while relatives seized whatever he earned. People would look at the boy, say "He is an orphan," and turn away, certain he would never amount to anything. Imagine how those looks must have landed on the heart of a child. And then remember how Allah chose to describe his Prophet's earliest condition, before anything else about him:

Did He not find you an orphan and shelter you? Did He not find you lost and guide you? Did He not find you in need and make you self-sufficient?

QUR'AN 93:6-8

Of all the circumstances of his life, this is the first that Allah names. He found you an orphan, in a world that showed orphans

no mercy. The whole of the Qur'an's command to honour the orphan, to never repulse him, to never turn him away, is lit from within by the fact that the one delivering that message had lived it. He knew, from the inside, exactly what it was to be the child everyone overlooked.

The women of Banu Sa'd

There was a custom among the noble families of Quraysh. They would send their infants into the desert to be nursed and raised for a time by women of a tribe called Banu Sa'd, who lived far from the city, in remote villages south of Ta'if. There were good reasons for it. The desert air protected the children from the diseases that travellers carried back into Makkah, the very kind of illness that had killed both of the Prophet's parents. The children grew accustomed to a hard, simple life with almost nothing, and they learned the purest, most beautiful Arabic, untouched by the mixing of tongues in the trading city.

These women came to Makkah once a year to take infants back under contract, and they chose carefully, because for them it was a livelihood. They looked for one of two things in a child: a wealthy family who would pay well, or a child being groomed for leadership, whose future authority might one day reward the woman who had been a mother to him. Money, or power. Those were the prospects that made a baby worth taking.

Now picture the Prophet ﷺ in that marketplace of hope. His father was dead and had left nothing. His grandfather was poor and dying. He had no older brother who might grow into a leader. His mother was a teenage widow in real poverty, with barely a brother of her own to lean on. By the measure those women used, he offered nothing at all. So Amina held her son out, and woman after woman came, asked their few questions, heard the

word "orphan," and moved on. One by one they chose other children. When the contracting was done, only one infant had not been taken. It was the Prophet ﷺ.

There is something almost unbearable in that scene. The mother, holding out her beautiful child, hoping someone would see his worth, and the world walking past, certain there was nothing in him to gain. The very child who would one day be a mercy to all the worlds was, for that moment, the baby no one wanted.

Halima takes the one no one wanted

Among those women was Halima bint Abi Dhu'ayb, who would become known as Halima al-Sa'diyya. Her very name carries something of her character: it comes from hilm, which means forbearance, gentleness, patience. She had come from Banu Sa'd with her husband, al-Harith ibn Abd al-Uzza (may Allah be pleased with him), for most of the scholars hold that he too later accepted Islam. With them were her young daughter, ash-Shayma, and an infant son.

That year, Halima later said, was a year of famine, and her family was the most stricken household in all of Banu Sa'd. She was so malnourished she could produce almost no milk. They had two animals, an old brown donkey and a thin she-camel, and neither gave anything. They went whole nights without sleep from hunger, their children crying for food, praying for rain that did not come. The journey to Makkah was long and brutal, and her weak donkey kept falling behind the caravan that pulled ahead and left her struggling. This was a last desperate effort: perhaps one of the families of Quraysh would give her a child and she could earn something to survive.

But she had no milk and no money to offer, and so the other women had passed her by just as the families had passed by the orphan. Every other woman had taken a child. She was about to go home empty-handed, the failure of a failed year. So she went back to her husband and spoke of the one infant left, the boy whose mother kept holding him out, the orphan no one would take. "I do not want to return with nothing," she said. "Let us take him. It is better than going home empty-handed. And perhaps Allah will place some good in him." She had no idea what she was saying. Al-Harith agreed. And so Halima went back to Amina and took the child no one else had wanted, under a contract to nurse him.

What happened next she would tell for the rest of her life. As they prepared to leave, her husband went to the thin she-camel and found her udders full of milk. They drank, and the animal seemed suddenly alive. She lifted the child to nurse him for the first time, and her own breast, dry from starvation, filled with milk, enough for him and for her own son too. She mounted the old donkey that had dragged behind the whole way to Makkah, and now it carried her so swiftly that the others called out for her to wait. Her husband said, "By Allah, Halima, you have taken hold of something blessed." When they reached home, still in the grip of drought, they sent their few sheep out to graze on the driest land imaginable, and the animals came back full, giving milk when nothing else in the region would. They knew, without understanding how, that a blessing had come to rest upon their house.

Strange and beautiful signs

Halima became, in every real sense, a mother to the Prophet ﷺ for these years. He grew healthy and strong, safe from the

diseases of the city, and he learned the pure tongue of Banu Sa'd. When his grandfather later saw him, he marvelled: "The beauty of Quraysh and the eloquence of Sa'd." The boy played with his foster brother Abdullah and adored his older foster sister ash-Shayma. He had a family, a real one, full of siblings and love.

When the agreed term ended, Halima could not bear to give him back. She returned to Amina and asked to keep him longer, for the blessing they had seen in him. Amina, puzzled by the unusual request from the same woman who had once been reluctant to take him at all, agreed out of a mother's love for her thriving child.

Then one day, as the Prophet ﷺ played with his foster brother, two men in white robes that no one had seen before came to him. The boy Abdullah came running to his mother, terrified, saying the men had thrown Muhammad to the ground and split open his chest. This was the angel Jibril. He had laid the Prophet ﷺ down, opened his chest, and removed from his heart a portion, saying, "This is the share of Shaytan in you." Then he cast it away and closed him up again, and there remained upon his chest a fine line of stitching that no one could explain. Halima and al-Harith ran out and found the boy on the ground, his face pale, shaken to his core, a small child who had just had his heart taken out and returned with no explanation he could grasp.

That night al-Harith, frightened, said, "Halima, I fear this boy has been struck by something." In their fear they decided to return him to his family, and brought him back to Amina before the term was done. When she heard their worry that some harm or curse had touched her son, she answered with the certainty of a mother who knew. "Do not say my child is cursed. This child of mine has a special status." And then she told them what she had

carried in silence. When she was pregnant with him, she said, she never felt his weight. When she delivered him, she saw a light come from her that lit up the palaces and the far country of ash-Sham. He was blessed, she insisted, not cursed, and something would one day come of him.

Amina never lived to see what that something was. She, like Halima, could not piece the signs together; she only knew they were there. Halima returned to her distant village, carrying a lifelong attachment to a boy she would not see for decades, while the Prophet ﷺ went on with his life in Makkah.

The grave at al-Abwa

When the Prophet ﷺ was about six, Amina took him to Madinah, then called Yathrib, to visit her relatives, the same family that would one day shelter her son when the whole world turned against him. On the way home she fell ill with a high fever in a village called al-Abwa. And there, in the middle of nowhere, a six-year-old boy who was already an orphan watched his mother die in front of him. He clung to her and cried as she took her last breath, and the people of the village buried her. He came back to Makkah now with no father and no mother. By the time he was eight, his grandfather Abd al-Muttalib would die too. He was passed from hand to hand, and his parents' two lives, added together, barely reached forty years.

This was the pain the Prophet ﷺ carried, and almost never spoke of. If you had met him later in Madinah, the honoured Messenger of Allah, you would scarcely have known how to raise such a thing with him, and he would not have raised it himself. He did not air his pain to people. He took it, at night, to his Lord.

So it is no small thing that this hidden grief surfaced near the end, when at last he turned off that road and climbed to the marked grave at al-Abwa and wept over his mother for the first time in over fifty years. He asked Allah's permission to seek forgiveness for her and was not granted it, for she had died before the message. But he was given permission to visit her grave, and he came. Fifty-four years of carried sorrow, poured out at last over the woman who had held him out to the world, hoping someone would see his worth.

A mother returned, and a debt repaid

And here the two stories come full circle in the most tender way. As his life drew toward its end, the people of his past began returning to him. After the battle of Hunayn, where the Hawazin, Halima's own people, had fought him and then come into Islam, a woman came forward to his encampment insisting, "I am the sister of your leader." He said that if she truly were his sister, there was a mark between them that only the two of them would know. She showed her arm, where he had once bitten her in play as a small boy in her care. It was ash-Shayma, Halima's daughter, his foster sister. He leapt to his feet, jolted by the past made suddenly present, spread his own cloak on the ground for her, and offered her either to stay with him, loved and honoured, or to return to her people with his care. She chose her people, and he saw to it generously.

Somewhere among those same tents was Halima al-Sa'diyya herself. Years before, during his marriage to Khadijah, when Banu Sa'd was again struck by famine, Halima had come to Makkah and found the boy she once nursed now a married man able to help, and Khadijah, who loved to honour everyone who had honoured her husband, gave her forty sheep and a camel. And

now, after all the years, there was one final meeting. A companion named Abu Tufayl described the strange and beautiful sight: the Prophet ﷺ himself preparing and slicing meat, and an old woman drawing near. He spread out his garment for her and, in one narration, said, "Welcome, my mother." He sat her down and served her with his own hands. When Abu Tufayl asked who she was, the answer came: "This is his mother, the one who nursed him." She and her husband and her surviving children embraced Islam. What she had truly gained from taking in the orphan no one wanted was not the milk of the camels or the energy of the donkey, but four years of blessing in this world and the greatest blessing of all in the next: faith, at the hands of the very child she had cradled.

What these mothers' lives ask of our faith

It is easy to read these two lives and feel only the weight of the sorrow, or only the wonder of the signs. But both women are putting a quiet question to our own iman.

Amina asks us about certainty in Allah's promise when we cannot yet see it. She held a fatherless, penniless child and the whole of Makkah told her, in a hundred small ways, that he was nothing. And she said, against all of it, that her son was blessed, that something would come of him. She died before she ever saw a single proof. That is the shape of real faith: to trust what Allah has placed in your care before the outcome is visible, to keep believing in His good even while the world counts you a failure. You will have seasons when, by every worldly measure, your efforts look like the child no one would take. Amina's life asks whether you can still say, in the dark, that Allah does not waste what He has entrusted to you.

Halima asks us about how we treat the ones the world overlooks. The poor, the orphaned, the unconnected, the people who offer us no obvious return, are exactly the ones her story is about. She took the boy who promised her nothing, not out of grand vision but simply because she could not bear to go home empty-handed and thought perhaps Allah might put some good in him. And Allah filled her house with blessing and her heart with faith. The Prophet ﷺ taught that the best house among the Muslims is one where an orphan is honoured, and the worst is one where an orphan is ill-treated. He also taught that of two men, one powerful and courted and the other poor and ignored, the overlooked one can be better in the sight of Allah than an earth full of the other. So here is the concrete thing. Today there is someone near you, or somewhere in the wider world of the hungry and the displaced, whom you are tempted to walk past because they cannot do anything for you. Halima's life asks you to stop, as she stopped, to give to them and to invite them to good, for the sake of Allah alone, expecting nothing back. You never know which overlooked soul Allah has filled with light.

And both of them, together, teach us about the mercy that grief can grow into. The Prophet ﷺ carried his pain to his Lord at night and let it soften him into a man who could look at any bereaved or broken person and know, from the inside, exactly what they felt. He did not parade his wounds. He turned them into compassion. When sorrow comes to you, and it will, you have the same two doors he had: to take it to people as a complaint, or to take it to Allah in the dark and let Him turn it into gentleness toward others. The first empties you. The second is how a heart becomes a mercy.

So carry one thing from each of these mothers into an ordinary day. Trust Allah's promise the way Amina trusted it, before any

proof arrives. Honour one overlooked person the way Halima honoured the orphan, quietly, for Allah. And when something hurts, bring it to your Lord rather than to the world, and let Him make you kinder for it. May Allah be pleased with Amina bint Wahb and with Halima al-Sa'diyya, reward them for what they gave to His most beloved, and gather us with the Prophet ﷺ and the souls who cared for him in the highest gardens of al-Firdaws.

This chapter follows the account of Amina bint Wahb (RA) and Halima al-Sa'diyya (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (93:6-8). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abu Sufyan ibn al-Harith

The Prophet's Brother

Picture Madinah in the last year of the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. A man comes through the streets toward the mosque, head lowered, eyes flowing with tears. He arrives before everyone else and leaves after everyone else. He says little to anyone. And he looks, to anyone who glances up, almost exactly like the Prophet ﷺ himself. A newcomer to Madinah, not knowing the history, would have to ask who he was. And when the Prophet ﷺ was asked, he answered simply: that is my brother.

It is one of the most quietly astonishing introductions in all the stories of the companions, because the man it describes had spent twenty years as one of the most determined enemies the Prophet ﷺ ever faced. To understand how a heart travels that distance, from brother, to enemy, to brother again, you have to begin long before Islam, in the house of Banu Hashim.

A brother in every way that mattered

His name was Abu Sufyan ibn al-Harith, and the very name places him at the heart of the Prophet's own family. He was not the famous Abu Sufyan, the one who led Quraysh in war and embraced Islam at the conquest. The books themselves confuse the two so often that you have to keep saying it: this is the other Abu Sufyan, and "Abu Sufyan" was only his nickname. His father, al-Harith, was the eldest son of Abd al-Muttalib, which made this

man the paternal first cousin of the Prophet ﷺ. In that society, the son of your father's brother was as near to you as a brother of your own blood.

Hold one image in your mind from the very beginning, because the story will return to it at the very end. When Abd al-Muttalib saw in a dream the buried well of Zamzam and went to dig it out in the centre of Makkah, the one son he had beside him, throwing the dirt aside as the water was uncovered, was al-Harith. That is the father of the man we are following: a son digging at his own father's side to recover the gift of Zamzam that the world still drinks from today.

The closeness did not stop at lineage. Abu Sufyan was born around the same year as the Prophet ﷺ, and the two were nursed together by Halimah, the most famous of the women who nursed the Prophet ﷺ in the desert. So he was a brother through nursing as well. Then he married into the family of Abu Talib, the very man who would become a father figure to the Prophet ﷺ. First cousin, milk-brother, married into the household closest to him: the bonds kept tightening.

And there was one more thing. Of all the companions later remembered for resembling the Prophet ﷺ in appearance, Abu Sufyan was among the closest of all. The likeness was so striking that when he travelled to Greater Syria, people would point at him and say, this is his cousin, this is his brother, because he looked exactly like the Prophet ﷺ. The two grew up connected at the hip. They loved one another, attended one another's weddings, exchanged gifts from their journeys. He was known for his eloquence and his fine manners, a poet who wrote in praise of the noble tribes of the Arabs. By every measure the world knew, these two were brothers.

The brother who turned away

So when revelation came, the Prophet ﷺ had every reason to expect that a man this close would be among the first to stand with him. He expected that the brother to whom he had shown nothing but goodness would recognise in him what others were beginning to recognise. Instead, Abu Sufyan turned his back, and all that love hardened into hatred.

It was a particular kind of pain. When the Prophet ﷺ was first told that his own people would drive him out, part of him could not imagine it coming from those nearest to him: his uncles, his cousins, his own house of Banu Hashim. Yet it was exactly those people who wounded him most. Abu Lahab, so entangled with the family that two of his sons were engaged to the Prophet's two daughters, rejected him in the most bitter way. And now Abu Sufyan, the brother of his childhood, became something the Prophet ﷺ could scarcely fathom.

The scholars who read his poetry find more than one thing moving beneath the surface. There is envy: two men who had been equals their whole lives, married at the same time, raising children at the same time, and now one of them was a prophet of God, lifting Banu Hashim above every rival tribe. There is the resentment of a man who felt his comfortable world had been disturbed. You can almost hear it in his accusations: everything was good, you were the most praised man among us, our family was doing well, why have you brought this upon us and complicated everything? His hatred was not forced upon him by circumstance. It was genuine, and it lasted.

For twenty years he used both his tongue and his sword against the Prophet ﷺ. He did not miss a single battle against him. He became the chief poet of Quraysh against him, so that much of

the poetry the books record against the Prophet ﷺ in those years is in truth the work of this Abu Sufyan, not the more famous one. When the Prophet ﷺ told the poet Hassan ibn Thabit to answer the disbelievers, pages upon pages of verse passed between Hassan and this same brother. And here is a detail that tells you how close the wound sat: Hassan was a master at tearing a man's lineage and tribe to pieces, yet the Prophet ﷺ warned him to be careful, because to attack the family and the appearance of Abu Sufyan was to attack the Prophet ﷺ himself. They shared the same blood and the same face. Hassan answered that he would draw the Prophet ﷺ out of it the way a hair is drawn from dough, untouched.

The Prophet ﷺ never met him face to face in battle. They did not exchange a single word for two decades. Forty years of brotherhood from birth, and then twenty years of silence and aggression. And through it all, the Prophet ﷺ did not stand and denounce him at length, did not make him the subject of his sermons. He carried the hurt quietly. It is part of the blessing of his example that even in his pain he wronged no one, yet he was still, truly, a man who felt pain.

The slow turning of a heart

The change did not come all at once. First his family went ahead of him. Every one of his brothers and his sister embraced Islam before the conquest of Makkah. His eldest brother, Nawfal, was taken captive at Badr, then freed, and returned a Muslim, so old by then that he was near the edge of life. Another came around the time of Uhud, and the Prophet ﷺ gave him a new name, Abdullah. Then his sister believed. Abu Sufyan was the last of them all, the one who held out to the very end.

His own wife, Jumana, leaned toward Islam as well. She bore the Prophet ﷺ no enmity. She could not even understand her husband's enmity. She saw only the goodness of the Prophet ﷺ, and she could not grasp why the man she was married to kept fighting against it for so long.

Then came the year of the conquest, and the last holdouts in Makkah understood that it was over. The story now comes from Abu Sufyan's own mouth. He watched the Prophet ﷺ arrive in the valley just outside Makkah, the very valley where Allah had promised His Messenger that he would return, and he saw the army of the Muslims, and he knew it was finished. He went to his wife and his son, Jafar, and told them he did not know what to do. His wife answered him plainly. She told him the whole world, Arab and non-Arab, was embracing this man Muhammad ﷺ, while he, who should have been the first to support him, was the one still clinging to his hatred. She shamed him: how can you, of all people, have waited until now? He said afterward that he was covered in shame, that he did not even know how the Prophet ﷺ would receive him after all he had done.

Twenty years too late, and forgiven

He set out with his son, his face wrapped, not knowing whether someone would kill him before he ever reached the Prophet ﷺ. As they neared the camp he left the camel behind and walked the rest of the way on foot, so as to cause no commotion, coming not as a man to fight but as a man to apologise. He reached the area of the Prophet's tent, uncovered his face, and looked at him.

The Prophet ﷺ turned away.

He moved again to face him, and again the Prophet ﷺ turned his face from him. He tried more than once to catch his eye, and

each time the Prophet ﷺ would not look at him. There was no aggression in it, no threat. There was forgiveness in it. But there was also twenty years of pain, and it would not vanish in an instant simply because the man who caused it had finally arrived. The Muslims around him saw how differently the Prophet ﷺ had turned away, and they grew angry on his behalf. Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) told him to leave. Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) was harsher still. A young man of the Ansar, who loved the Prophet ﷺ and did not even know Abu Sufyan, stood and said everything he could, calling him the enemy of Allah who had carried his hostility to the Prophet ﷺ from every corner of the earth.

This is the deep instruction in it. The Prophet ﷺ had taught his companions to love him more than they loved themselves, and so when they saw his hurt, they shunned the one who had caused it. Abu Sufyan understood that he had received not the worst he deserved, which was death, but a portion of it. He went to the Prophet's uncle, al-Abbas, and pleaded for intercession. Al-Abbas came and reminded the Prophet ﷺ that this was his own cousin, his own family. The Prophet ﷺ said they would be forgiven, but he would not simply pretend that none of it had happened. There had to be some acknowledgement. Of Abu Sufyan he said: this is the man who attacked my honour.

Then the women of Quraysh came seeking forgiveness, Abu Sufyan's wife among them, and the Prophet ﷺ forgave them all without difficulty. And at last Abu Sufyan came and spoke the words of Islam, and apologised, and said, there is no blame upon me, Messenger of Allah. The Prophet ﷺ answered, there is no blame upon you, Abu Sufyan, and told him to go and teach his cousin the prayer and the ablution. He was forgiven, fully and clearly. But Abu Sufyan said the smile he longed for was still not

there. He wanted nothing in the world so much as for the Prophet ﷺ to smile at him again, and it had not yet come. He even said that if it stayed this way he would take his son and walk out into the desert until he died of hunger and thirst, rather than live with the weight of what he had done.

It was the Battle of Hunayn that gave him his chance. The Muslims were ambushed in the valley and the army scattered, and only a few remained around the Prophet ﷺ as he sat on his mule like a towering mountain, refusing to flee. Abu Sufyan went to the side of the animal, took hold of the reins, and fought. In the middle of the chaos the Prophet ﷺ, not recognising the man because his face was covered, asked who this was at his side. The answer came: your brother, Abu Sufyan. And there, finally, the heart reopened. The Prophet ﷺ welcomed him and prayed for his blessing and told him to go forward, that Allah was with him. They fought together to the end of the battle, and afterward came the embrace that Abu Sufyan had waited for. The Prophet ﷺ said he hoped that Allah had given him this brother in place of Hamza, his beloved uncle whose death had wounded him so deeply. He asked that this brother be forgiven, and prayed that Allah grant him Paradise.

A face turned only toward Allah

The pain that the Prophet ﷺ carried was part of the meaning of this whole story. Hostility and hurtful words had been part of the path of every messenger before him, and he was not spared them.

The man who had once been a source of that very hurt now became one of the most devoted worshippers in Madinah. He had no interest in being honoured for who he had been before. He came back into the city and the Prophet ﷺ opened his heart

to him completely, and just as the companions had once shunned him because they saw the Prophet's pain, now they honoured him because they saw the Prophet ﷺ treating him as a brother once more.

But Abu Sufyan turned away from the world entirely. He fell in love with the Qur'an. He became known for it, reciting it day and night, until he was almost a recluse, speaking to no one. He would come to the mosque with his head lowered and stay there through the heat of the day until the latest hour, praying, reciting, his eyes welling with tears, his gaze never lifting from his own sandals. He was the first into the mosque and the last to leave it. This was the man whose tongue had once been a weapon, the poet who had filled the air with verse against the Muslims, now folded entirely into silence and worship. He wanted only to make up for the years he had spent as an enemy, to do at last what he should have done in the first place.

It was this man that Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) saw and did not recognise, for she had been too young to know that old history. She watched this brother of the Prophet ﷺ come to the mosque weeping and constantly turning back to Allah, and she was astonished by him. The Prophet ﷺ told her who he was. That is Abu Sufyan, my cousin, he said. He is the first to enter the mosque and the last to leave it, and his eyes never leave his sandals.

Digging his own grave

The Prophet ﷺ did not live long after the conquest, and so Abu Sufyan was left with the ache of knowing how much of the Prophet's life in Islam he had missed, how little time he had been given to stand beside him. When the Prophet ﷺ passed away, Abu Sufyan grieved as a man grieves the greatest loss the earth

has ever known. He kept to his life of the mosque through the years that followed.

Near the end, on a journey to Hajj, a barber shaving his head struck a swelling hidden there, and the wound became an infection that would eventually take his life. For this the scholars counted him a martyr, a strange and gentle kind of martyrdom. And when Abu Sufyan felt that death was near, the people of Madinah saw him do something they could not understand. He went out to the cemetery, beside the resting place of the Prophet ﷺ where the companions are buried, and he dug his own grave. He was still well enough that it seemed he might recover, yet there he was, fashioning the place where he would lie. When they asked him, he said: O Allah, I do not wish to live on after the death of the Prophet ﷺ and my brother. Let me follow them. His own eldest brother had died only shortly before.

Three days later he lay in his home with his family weeping around him, and he comforted them. Do not cry over me, he said, for by Allah I have not committed a single sin since the day I became a Muslim. He died, and he was buried exactly where he had asked, in the section of the cemetery closest of all to the Prophet ﷺ and his family.

What Abu Sufyan's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and remember only the dramatic turn, the enemy who became a worshipper. But there is something here that reaches past the story and puts a question to our own iman.

Abu Sufyan lived for twenty years inside a hardness he could not see. He was not an evil man by the standards of his world. He was eloquent, well mannered, a poet, a faithful brother, and all of

it sat alongside a settled enmity toward the truth, fed by envy and by the comfort he did not want disturbed. That should make us pause, because the most dangerous distance from Allah is not always the loud kind. It is the quiet refusal to submit while everything else in our character looks fine. Ask yourself honestly where you, too, may be holding something back from Allah, not out of open rebellion, but because surrendering it would unsettle a life that feels comfortable as it is.

And then look at how he was received, because the mercy in it is meant for you. He came twenty years too late, having spent those years as an enemy, and Allah accepted him completely. The Prophet's first reaction was human pain, and the path back to full warmth took time and took proof. But the door was never shut. This is the promise that should reach the heart of anyone who feels they have wasted years, that they have come to Allah too late, that their record is too stained to matter now. It is never too late to turn. The God who took a man who had fought Him for two decades and seated him in Paradise is the same God you would be turning to today. Do not let shame over the past keep you from the One who is waiting to forgive it.

But notice what real repentance looked like in him, because this is the quality to take into an ordinary life. He did not treat forgiveness as the end of the matter. He spent the rest of his days trying to give back to Allah what he had withheld for so long, the first into the mosque, the last to leave, his face wet with the Qur'an, asking nothing from anyone, seeking no honour for himself. That is sincerity, ikhlas, the same quiet thing that ran through so many of the believers: to turn fully toward Allah and let the world fall away, to want His pleasure so completely that you stop performing for anyone else. You do not need to have been an enemy to live that way. You only need to decide that the

years ahead will be spent for Allah, in private acts no one will ever see, the way Abu Sufyan spent his with his eyes never leaving his sandals.

So take one thing from him into this week. If there is something you have been refusing to surrender to Allah, name it and give it to Him. If there is a sin or a stretch of heedlessness you think has closed the door, come back anyway, certain that He receives the latecomer as surely as He received this man. And let one act of worship today be done only for Him, unseen, the prayer prayed a little longer, the Qur'an read with the heart, the tear that no one notices. That is how a brother who had wandered for twenty years came home, and the way home is still open. May Allah be pleased with Abu Sufyan ibn al-Harith, who died saying he had not sinned since the day he believed, and gather us, latecomers and all, in the company of those whose faces were turned at the last toward Him alone.

This chapter follows the account of Abu Sufyan ibn al-Harith (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abu Sufyan ibn Harb

The Enemy Who Was Forgiven

For twenty years, when a Muslim in Madinah heard the name Abu Sufyan, something hardened in the chest. He was not one enemy among many. He was the ringleader, the man always there in the gathering that plotted against the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the one the others turned to when the banner had to be carried and the war had to be won. If you weigh the whole of the Prophet's life and ask who the Muslims hated most, it is hard to find a name that comes before his. He fought them at Uhud. He laid siege to their city. He stood over the dying and tortured them. And then, near the very end, he became one of them, was forgiven, and was buried among the companions in the graveyard of the people he had once tried to destroy.

His story is one of the most difficult in the whole tradition, and one of the most necessary, because it is a story about what the mercy of Allah and the patience of His Messenger can do to a heart that looks, from every angle, beyond saving.

The rock, the son of war

His name was Sakhr ibn Harb ibn Umayya ibn Abd Shams. Sakhr means rock. Harb, his father's name, means war. The rock, the son of war: it is hard to imagine a name that fit a man more exactly. He is remembered by his kunya, Abu Sufyan, which he seems to have taken from his own father rather than from a son,

a name that carries the sense of swiftness, of moving like a storm.

He was born into power and bred for it. His father had been a warlord of Quraysh, looked upon by the generation before Islam as a man fit to succeed Abdul Muttalib in the leadership of Makkah. Abu Sufyan inherited all of it: the nobility, the responsibility for one of the great clans of the city, Banu Abd Shams, and the wealth that came from running the caravans north to Syria and south to Yemen. He was the merchant the foreign traders knew by name. He was the man Quraysh trusted with its commerce and, when things grew desperate, with its wars. He stood between the eldest leaders of Makkah and the younger generation, the natural next leader of the whole city.

He was also older than the Prophet ﷺ, born, it is said, twenty years before him, and he would die twenty years after him, living close to a hundred years. So when the message of Islam came, Abu Sufyan was a man with everything to lose: position, fortune, and the seniority that made him the heir to Makkah itself. Unlike Abu Jahl, he was not quick to violence. He was the schemer, the strategist, the one who worked quietly in the background to undermine the Prophet ﷺ while keeping his own reputation clean and his caravans moving. He was, in short, far too invested in the old order to ever concede that a man from another clan was a prophet of Allah, because to concede it was to lose everything he was.

The man who fought them at every turn

Allah tested each of these men through their own families. Abu Sufyan's daughter, Umm Habibah (may Allah be pleased with her), was among the very first to believe, the second from her clan after Uthman ibn Affan, who was Abu Sufyan's own cousin.

She and her husband fled the persecution of Makkah, the persecution her father was part of, to take refuge in Abyssinia. To Abu Sufyan it was an embarrassment. To us it is the first sign that this family was never as far from Allah as it seemed.

When his relatives left for Abyssinia, Abu Sufyan seized their homes, sold them, and folded the money into his caravan. He showed no regard even for his own kin. His caravan grew, fattened on the stolen wealth of Muslims, and it was that caravan, a thousand camels and a fortune in goods, that the Prophet ﷺ moved to intercept, setting in motion the events of Badr. Abu Sufyan, clever as ever, diverted the caravan to safety and called the army of Makkah out to fight. He himself was not in the battle; his task was the caravan. But his eldest son died at Badr as a disbeliever, and his father-in-law and most of his wife's family were killed there too, three of them, Utbah, Shaybah, and al-Walid, falling in the opening duel. From that day his wife Hind bint Utbah carried a vengeance against Hamza (may Allah be pleased with him) that would become one of the ugliest scenes in the whole history.

After Badr, the elders of Quraysh were gone, and Abu Sufyan became the supreme commander. He led the army at Uhud. He led the great siege of Madinah at the Battle of the Trench. He was the one who put his entire personal fortune into the effort to wipe the Muslims off the earth, and was praised in Makkah for his generosity while every coin of it went into oppression. At Uhud his wife brought out the women with their drums, composed poetry to shame any man who fled, and promised the man Wahshi his freedom if he killed Hamza and brought back his liver, which she then chewed in a final act of humiliation over the master of the martyrs.

And here is the thing to hold onto. Abu Sufyan should have died many times over. At Uhud, a young companion knocked him off his horse and stood over him ready to strike, and was killed from behind at that exact moment. His wife Hind was once directly beneath the sword of Abu Dujana (may Allah be pleased with him), who pulled the blade back because he would not use the sword of the Prophet ﷺ to strike a woman. At the Trench, Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman slipped into the enemy camp at night and found himself standing right beside Abu Sufyan, close enough to kill him, and held his hand only because the Prophet ﷺ had told him to cause no commotion. Again and again, the sword reached his neck and was drawn back. Allah was sparing this man, and no one yet understood why.

A prophet too noble to deny

There is a scene from Madinah that captures Abu Sufyan's whole strange mind. When he learned that the Prophet ﷺ had sent a proposal of marriage to his daughter Umm Habibah, a widow now, far away in Abyssinia, he was at that very time plotting to kill the Prophet ﷺ in Madinah. And yet his reaction was: "That is a noble stallion who should not be refused." I am trying to kill the man, and I cannot stand him, but he is of noble lineage and my daughter is in good hands. It tells you that his enmity was never about truth. It was about tribe and money, tribe and money, and nothing deeper.

The clearest proof that the truth was reaching him came from an enemy. After the treaty of Hudaibiyyah gave him a pause from war, Abu Sufyan took a trading party north and was summoned, to his alarm, into the court of Heraclius, the emperor of Rome, who had just received the Prophet's letter calling him to Islam. Heraclius questioned him closely, warning his companions to

correct any lie, and Abu Sufyan, unable to lie, was forced to tell the truth about the man he hated. Is he of noble family? Yes. Did anyone make this claim before him? No. Are his followers the powerful or the weak? The weak. Are they increasing or decreasing? Increasing. Does anyone abandon the religion in disappointment after entering it? No, never. Did you ever know him to lie or break a promise? Never. One by one, Heraclius matched the answers to the signs of a true prophet and told Abu Sufyan plainly: this is a prophet of Allah. Abu Sufyan walked out shaken. He said afterward that from that day he knew the Prophet ﷺ would triumph, and that it was only a matter of time before Allah brought him into Islam. The certainty had entered his mind. It had not yet reached his heart.

Isn't it time?

When the Makkans broke the treaty, Abu Sufyan understood at once that the balance had shifted. The Muslim community had grown beyond anything Makkah could fight. He rushed to Madinah to salvage the peace, and for the first time in his life found every door shut. The Prophet ﷺ turned from him. Abu Bakr turned from him. Umar turned from him. His own former companions turned from him. In desperation he went to his daughter Umm Habibah, whom he had not seen in nearly fifteen years, and as he moved to sit she quickly folded up the only mattress in the house. "Is it too noble for me," he asked, "or am I too noble for it?" "This is the bed of the Messenger of Allah," she answered, "and you are not worthy to sit on it." His own daughter. He went home understanding that this thing he had fought was now beyond resistance.

On the night the Prophet ﷺ camped outside Makkah for its conquest, Abu Sufyan was brought to him by al-Abbas, the

Prophet's uncle, who had been urging him for days to give it up. The Prophet ﷺ looked at him and said, "Woe to you, Abu Sufyan. Isn't it time you knew that there is no god but Allah?" And Abu Sufyan, praising his kindness, admitted that yes, he was beginning to think that if there had been any other god, one of them would have helped him by now. Then the Prophet ﷺ said, "Woe to you. Isn't it time you knew that I am the Messenger of Allah?" And still he hesitated, until al-Abbas pressed him, warning him for his own life, and he said the words, though even then his heart had not fully arrived.

What the Prophet ﷺ did next is the heart of the whole story. Al-Abbas knew the man and said quietly, "Messenger of Allah, Abu Sufyan loves to be honored. Give him something." The Prophet ﷺ could have said: this man killed Muslims, he is an enemy of Allah, why should I care for his pride on the day of my victory? Instead he looked past the moment to the larger work of winning a heart, and he announced as he entered the city: "Whoever enters the house of Abu Sufyan is safe. Whoever enters the Sacred Mosque is safe. Whoever closes his door is safe." Imagine what it meant to a man like Abu Sufyan to hear his own house named as a place of refuge by the man he had hunted for twenty years.

The day of mercy

The conquest of Makkah was not a simple thing to manage, because the early Muslims who had been tortured for their faith were now standing over the elites who had tortured them, and their hearts were not soft. One of the great companions of the Ansar marched in with the banner declaring, "Today is the day of slaughter, today is the day of revenge." Abu Sufyan complained to the Prophet ﷺ, and rather than dismiss him, the Prophet ﷺ

took the banner away and corrected the words: "Today is the day of mercy. Today the Kaaba is honored."

When Bilal climbed the Kaaba to call the adhan, the old racism still stirred in Abu Sufyan, and the early Muslims, Bilal, Ammar, and Suhayb, looked at him and said the swords of Allah had not reached the neck of the enemy of Allah as they should have. Abu Bakr, thinking like the Prophet ﷺ about calming the city, rebuked them for speaking so to the leader of Quraysh. But the Prophet ﷺ would not let the moment pass: "Abu Bakr, if you have upset them, you have upset your Lord." He was reaching for Abu Sufyan's heart, but he would not diminish the men who had suffered everything for Allah while Abu Sufyan fought him. Abu Bakr returned to Bilal, Ammar, and Suhayb and asked their forgiveness, and they gave it. It was at this conquest, the scholars say, with Bilal standing upon the Kaaba, that Allah revealed the verse that erased the very pride Abu Sufyan had carried his whole life:

People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one another. In God's eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware.

QUR'AN 49:13

And when Hind came forward, the woman who had chewed the liver of Hamza, the most beloved of men to the Prophet ﷺ, terrified of what she would find, he received her with warmth and accepted her testimony of faith. No blame on you today. It is over. The same words Yusuf had spoken to the brothers who threw him into the well, spoken now in the same spirit, to the woman who had mutilated his uncle.

Your enemy will become a friend

Once Islam settled in Abu Sufyan's heart, the man of war became a soldier for Allah, and he never looked back. At the Battle of Hunayn, when the ambush scattered the army and most men fled, the Prophet ﷺ looked to his right and left and found, refusing to leave his side, Ali, Abu Bakr, Umar, Usama, and Abu Sufyan, an old man now, fighting courageously to protect the very Prophet he had once hunted. He asked the Prophet ﷺ for three things: to confirm his daughter's marriage, to take his son Muawiyah as a scribe, and to be made a commander so he could fight for Islam as he had fought against it. The Prophet ﷺ granted all three.

At Ta'if he was struck in the eye and lost it. He came to the Prophet ﷺ and said, "My eye was lost for the sake of Allah." The Prophet ﷺ offered him a choice: "If you wish, I will pray and Allah will return your sight to you. And if you wish, you will have Paradise instead." The same Abu Sufyan who had once measured everything in tribe and money answered, "Paradise. I will take Paradise." There it is, the whole transformation in a single word. The man who would not give up an idol now gave up his own eye and asked only for what lies beyond this world. This is the verse the Prophet ﷺ was living before Abu Sufyan's eyes:

Good and evil cannot be equal. [Prophet], repel evil with what is better and your enemy will become as close as an old and valued friend,

QUR'AN 41:34

He went on to help destroy the idol al-Lat, the very kind of stone he had once beaten his chest to defend. He fought the apostates after the Prophet ﷺ passed. Abu Bakr made him a governor. And at the end of his long life he went out as a soldier in the cause of

Allah and fought at Yarmouk under the banner of his own son, an old man calling out across the battlefield: "O victory of Allah, draw near. O Allah, this is a day from Your days. O Allah, send down Your help." The Muslims won, and Abu Sufyan was struck in his second eye. Both of his eyes were given for the sake of Allah, the same eyes that had once watched and plotted the ruin of Islam.

He died close to a hundred years old, in Madinah, during the caliphate of his cousin Uthman, who prayed the funeral prayer over him. His daughter, a wife of the Prophet ﷺ, tended to his burial. He was laid to rest in al-Baqi, among the companions, in the city he had once besieged and tried to wipe from the earth. The man who had shouted "May Hubal be exalted" at Uhud was buried to the sound of "Allahu akbar."

What Abu Sufyan's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read this life as a tale of a clever villain who came good in the end, and to leave it there, satisfied. That misses what it is asking of us. Abu Sufyan's story is not finally about him. It is about the patience of Allah, and what that patience demands of our own hearts.

Look first at how long Allah waited. Twenty years of plotting, two great battles, a siege, the torture of believers, and still the sword was drawn back from his neck again and again, because Allah was not finished with him. If you carry a hardness in your own heart, a sin you keep returning to, a distance from Allah you assume is permanent, this life is here to tell you that the door is not closed while you are still breathing. Allah is the one who turns hearts, and He turned the hardest heart in Makkah. Do not despair of His mercy for yourself, and do not write off another soul as beyond it. That is the meaning of the Prophet's prayer, "O

Turner of hearts, keep my heart firm upon Your religion." The hearts are between His fingers, including the ones you have given up on, including your own.

Then look at what finally changed Abu Sufyan. It was not an argument. It was mercy he did not deserve, offered by a man who had every worldly right to take revenge and chose instead to honor him and call him gently, again and again, "Isn't it time?" This is the quality to take into your ordinary life: the patient, dignified kindness that wins a heart no debate ever could. There is someone in your life right now who has wronged you, or who seems far from any good. The Prophet's way with Abu Sufyan asks whether you can repel that evil with something better, not to be admired for your patience, but for the sake of Allah, trusting that He can use your mercy to soften a heart you cannot reach by force. "Your enemy will become as close as an old and valued friend" is not a sentiment. It is a promise from your Lord, and Abu Sufyan is its living proof.

And look, last, at the word that marked his transformation: "Paradise. I will take Paradise." The old Abu Sufyan measured every choice by what it gained him in this world, in standing and wealth and tribe. The new one gave his eye, and then the other, and counted them cheap beside the Hereafter. That shift, from living for the eyes of people and the goods of this life to living for what is with Allah, is the shift this religion is asking of every one of us. You may never lose an eye in battle. But you will be asked, today and tomorrow, to give up some small comfort, some bit of pride, some pleasure you cling to, in exchange for something you cannot yet see. The believer is the one who learns to say, in the small choices and the large, "I will take Paradise."

So take one thing from this life into your own. Refuse to give up on a heart, beginning with your own. Answer one wrong this week with a kindness done purely for Allah. And when the choice comes between what this world offers and what He has promised, choose as Abu Sufyan finally learned to choose. May Allah be pleased with Abu Sufyan, who fought the truth for twenty years and then died defending it, and may He who turned that heart turn ours, and keep them firm upon His path until we meet Him.

This chapter follows the account of Abu Sufyan ibn Harb (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (49:13, 41:34). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Ikrimah ibn Abi Jahl

The Son Who Outran His Father's Name

There is a kind of man you would never expect to find among the beloved of Allah. He is the heir of the worst enemy the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ ever faced, raised at that enemy's side, learning his hatreds, watching him torture the weak, groomed to inherit his throne and his war. By every reckoning of this world, his fate is already written: he will die as his father died, an enemy of the truth, and history will swallow him without a trace.

And then Allah writes a different ending.

His name was Ikrimah ibn Abi Jahl (may Allah be pleased with him), and his story is one of the most startling in the history of the companions, because it begins in the house of the man the Prophet ﷺ himself called the Pharaoh of this nation.

The house of the Pharaoh of this ummah

To understand Ikrimah, you must first sit with the weight of who his father was. The Prophet ﷺ called Abu Jahl the Pharaoh of this ummah, and the comparison was exact: just as a tyrant rose in the days of Musa, a tyrant rose in the days of Muhammad ﷺ, and ruled Makkah with the same blind cruelty.

Scholars counted more than eighty verses of the Qur'an revealed in response to this one man. He took the slaves who had embraced Islam and made a public torture camp of their suffering for all of Makkah to watch. He drove a spear through a

defenseless woman to make an example of her. He started the boycott that starved the Prophet's clan and contributed to the deaths of Khadijah and Abu Talib, and he designed the plot to assassinate the Prophet ﷺ on the night of the Hijra. When the first verses of the Qur'an were revealed, the next passage of that same chapter spoke of him:

*Have you seen the man who forbids [Our] servant to pray?
Have you seen whether he is rightly guided, or encourages
true piety? Have you seen whether he denies the truth and
turns away from it? Does he not realize that God sees all?*

QUR'AN 96:9-14

Now place a boy in the shadow of that man, watching and assisting, the son being raised to succeed him. Abu Jahl was the chief of Banu Makhzum, the rival clan determined to destroy the Prophet ﷺ simply because he came from Banu Hashim. Ikrimah was its crown prince, and when the father took power, the son would inherit it.

But the Prophet ﷺ saw something even in the Pharaoh of this ummah. He once made a famous supplication, asking Allah to give victory to Islam through the more beloved to Him of two men, one of whom was Abu Jahl. He recognized a leader there, strength and intelligence and eloquence, a heart that, if it ever turned, could become one of the greatest assets the Muslims had. The qualities were real. They were simply pointed in the wrong direction. And those same qualities, the size, the strength, the wisdom, the eloquence, ran in the blood of his son.

What the Prophet ﷺ hoped for the father, and never received, would one day come true in the son.

The hatred he inherited

Ikrimah did not choose his enmity at first. He inherited it. He hated the Prophet ﷺ because his father hated him, and for years that was the whole of it: a son carrying his father's war.

Then came Badr, and the hatred became his own.

On the day of Badr, Abu Jahl led the army of Quraysh against the small band of Muslims, certain he would wipe them out. He did not. He was struck down by two teenagers who had asked which man in the field was Abu Jahl because they had heard how he abused the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and it was Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, the smallest of the companions, the very man whose collarbone Abu Jahl had once broken for reciting Qur'an, who finished him. The Pharaoh of this ummah died exactly as the Pharaoh of Musa had died, humiliated and refusing the truth to his last breath.

For Ikrimah, this changed everything. Before Badr, his hatred had been handed to him. After Badr, it was personal: the man he now wanted dead was the man whose followers had killed his father. He said openly that he could not live while Muhammad ﷺ lived. At Uhud he fought ferociously, and his wife, Umm Hakim, beat the war drums and chanted lyrics of death against the Muslims. This was a whole family bent on the destruction of Islam, and Ikrimah was now at its head, having assumed his father's place as chief of Banu Makhzum. His grief had curdled into something that blinded him; he could no longer see the man the rest of Makkah was beginning to see, only the death of his father.

The amnesty he did not deserve

Years passed. His closest cousin and best friend, Khalid ibn al-Walid, came to him one day and confided that he was thinking of

embracing Islam. Ikrimah erupted. You want me, he said, to follow the religion of the man who killed my father? It was the only lens he had. Khalid embraced Islam anyway and made his way to Madinah; Ikrimah had been among those who tried to stop him.

Then came the day Makkah fell. When the Prophet ﷺ returned at last to the city that had tortured him, exiled him, and broken his family, he did not come for revenge, though by every law of war he had the right to take it. He came instead in the spirit of the Prophet Yusuf, who told the brothers who had thrown him into a well that there was no blame upon them that day. He declared a general amnesty over Makkah, forgiving the people who had killed his companions, crucified the believers, and driven him from his home. The mercy of it shocked his enemies, who knew what they would have done in his place, and the difference of the man began to soften hearts that twenty years of fighting had hardened.

But Ikrimah did not soften. Even as the Prophet ﷺ was forgiving the whole city, Ikrimah and a few others gathered to attack the Muslims as they entered, and they were beaten back, Khalid ibn al-Walid warding off their assault. The Prophet ﷺ had named only a small handful from whom the amnesty was withheld, men whose crimes were too grave, and of one he had said that even if he were found clinging to the cloth of the Kaaba, he was to be taken out. Ikrimah was on that list, for he had plotted against the Prophet ﷺ to the very last moment. And so, while the rest of Makkah breathed in safety, he fled toward Yemen, meaning to board a ship and escape across the sea. The destination is one of the great ironies of his life: he was fleeing to Abyssinia, the very land that had sheltered the persecuted Muslims two

decades earlier, to beg its king for the refuge he had once tried to deny them.

The sea, and the wife who came to save him

What happened on the way is the hinge of the whole story. Ikrimah boarded the ship in Yemen, and out on the open water a violent storm rose up and threw the vessel left and right until everyone aboard was certain they would drown. Then the captain called out to the passengers: pray sincerely to your Lord, for no one will save you here but Him. Call upon Him alone, for nothing else can reach you now.

Ikrimah looked around at the terrified men crying out to Allah, and something cracked open in him. At the edge of death, he watched even strangers strip away every false god and turn to the One, and the thought came to him with a force he could not argue away: if it is only Allah who can save us here on the sea, then surely it is only Allah who can save us on the land. He would later trace the entry of faith into his heart to that exact moment on the shaking ship.

It is the situation the Qur'an describes, the heart laid bare by the storm, calling upon Allah with a sincerity it forgets the moment the danger passes. For Ikrimah, the sincerity did not pass. The storm drove the ship back to Yemen, so he never reached Abyssinia at all, and the man who stepped back onto the shore was no longer the man who had sailed.

And while he was at sea, his wife was already on the road to find him. Umm Hakim, the same woman who had beaten the drums of war at Uhud, had entered upon the Prophet ﷺ in Makkah and embraced Islam wholeheartedly, and she did not ask only for her own pardon. She had heard that her husband was a marked man,

to be taken out even if he clung to the cloth of the Kaaba, and she asked the Prophet ﷺ to grant him safety. Without hesitation, he did. Now she had only to find Ikrimah and bring him home.

Her own journey carried its own trial. A man she had brought along to guide her tried to harm her on the road, and when she reached Ikrimah in Yemen, the first matter between them was not faith but her protection; he dealt with the man who had wronged her before another word passed. Only then could the real conversation begin. Ikrimah, overjoyed, approached her, and she stopped him. You cannot, she said. I am a Muslim now, and you are still upon disbelief. Save yourself from ruin. Muhammad ﷺ is a man of forgiveness, and he has pardoned you. Come back not only safe in this life, but safe in the next. Enough fighting. Enough.

Between the storm that had already turned his heart and the wife who now stood before him a believer, Ikrimah's resistance fell away. Overwhelmed that the Prophet ﷺ would forgive him at all, he finally said it: let us go back to Muhammad ﷺ.

The return, and the redemption

As Ikrimah journeyed back toward Makkah with his wife, the Prophet ﷺ announced to the companions that Ikrimah was coming, both as a migrant and as a believer. Then he gave them an instruction that reveals the depth of his understanding of the human heart: do not insult his father. Do not speak ill of Abu Jahl in his presence, for insulting the dead does not reach the dead and does not benefit the living; it only wounds the one still here.

Was Abu Jahl evil? Yes, beyond question, with verses of Qur'an revealed against him. And yet the Prophet ﷺ understood that Ikrimah loved his father, and that there was nothing to be gained

by tearing at that wound. He was not building a case against a dead tyrant. He was building a community of hearts, and he would not let a returning believer be crushed by shame.

When Ikrimah approached, hesitant, half-expecting the trap he himself would once have laid, the Prophet ﷺ called out from a distance, welcoming the migrant who came riding toward him with love rather than reproach. Ikrimah lowered his head and asked, simply, what should I say? Where do I even begin? The Prophet ﷺ had him repeat the testimony of faith. And then Ikrimah, overcome, began to beg: ask Allah to forgive me for every time I fought you, for every time I cursed you, for every time I blocked the path to you.

The Prophet ﷺ raised his hands and prayed for him: O Allah, forgive him for all the hostility he directed against me, for every battle he fought to put out Your light, and for everything bad he ever said about me, to my face and behind my back.

Ikrimah's face shone. And he made an oath that became the shape of the rest of his life. He swore by Allah that he would not rest until he spent in the cause of Allah everything he had once spent against it, and fought for His sake as hard as he had once fought against it, redeeming every wrong with a right.

And his oath carried a particular wording that tells you everything he had come to understand. When he swore, he would say: by the One who saved me on the day of Badr. Badr was the day his hatred had become personal, the day his father died, the lowest point of his enmity. He came to see that had Allah decreed his own death that day, he would have died exactly as his father did, just another forgotten man lost in the punishment. But Allah had spared him for this. The very day he might have remembered

with rage, he now remembered with gratitude, as the day Allah had quietly kept him alive for a destiny his father never reached.

Wounds in every direction

Ikrimah's Islam did not merely begin; it became excellent. It was said that he never committed a sin from the day he embraced the faith. He was brave in battle, he fasted deep into the days and stood deep into the nights, and he would press the Qur'an to his face and weep, saying, the Book of my Lord, the words of my Lord. The same intensity that had once burned against the truth now burned for it. The son of the chief idolater went through Makkah destroying idols alongside the Prophet ﷺ, and he gave away all the wealth he had inherited from Abu Jahl for the sake of Allah.

But one grief stayed with him. Unlike his friends, he had never had his moment beside the Prophet ﷺ in the hard early years; he had been the enemy in every battle, and the Prophet ﷺ passed away before he could ever stand at the side of the one he now loved most. That ache drove him at Yarmuk.

Yarmuk was the great confrontation between this young Muslim community and the might of the Roman Empire, and on that day men who had once fought the Prophet ﷺ stood together on the side of faith, dying for the cause they had once tried to destroy. Khalid ibn al-Walid commanded. Ikrimah plunged into the enemy, taking wound after wound, and Khalid, alarmed, told him not to throw himself in so deeply, that his loss would be a heavy blow to a Muslim army already outnumbered. Ikrimah answered like a man settling an old account with his own soul. You, he told Khalid, had your time with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ; you stood with him. My father and I were among his fiercest enemies. Leave me. Let me make amends for what I did. He had fought the

Prophet ﷺ in every battle of his old life; would he now flee the Romans? He called out, who will pledge to fight to the death with me? A small band answered, and they had a great hand in the victory of that day. It was said that Ikrimah suffered more than seventy wounds at Yarmuk, his body cut in every direction.

The cup of water

And so we come to the scene that, more than any battle, has carried Ikrimah's name down through the centuries. It appears in nearly every explanation of the hadith: none of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.

After the fighting at Yarmuk, Ikrimah lay among the wounded. Near him lay his uncle, al-Harith ibn Hisham, the brother of Abu Jahl. And a short distance away lay Ayyash ibn Abi Rabi'ah, a believer whom Abu Jahl had once tortured and forced back from his faith, one of those for whom the verse was revealed:

Say, '[God says], My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of God's mercy. God forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.

QUR'AN 39:53

The man carrying water came first to Ikrimah and lifted the cup to his lips. But Ikrimah saw that his uncle nearby was also wounded, and he said: take it to him first. The water-carrier brought it to al-Harith, who saw Ayyash and said the same: take it to him first. And when the man reached Ayyash, the cup was refused again, and sent on to the next of the wounded. Ten men, each parched and dying, and each one turned the water toward his brother. By the time the water-carrier returned, Ikrimah had died, and al-

Harith, and Ayyash, one after another, all of them gone, each having given his last drink to another.

The ending of Ikrimah is the exact opposite of his father's. Abu Jahl died demanding, sneering, refusing the truth, asking only who had won. Ikrimah died giving, choosing his brother's thirst over his own, a martyr in the cause he had spent half his life trying to crush. What the Prophet ﷺ had once hoped for the father had become the reality of the son.

His wife Umm Hakim outlived him, and her courage did not fade; in a later battle at the gates of Damascus she is remembered for striking down several Roman soldiers with a tent pole. Ikrimah left a son who embraced Islam on the same day he did and was also martyred at Yarmuk, so that no lineage of his outlived him. But what he left was larger than a bloodline: a proof, written into the memory of this ummah, of what Allah can do with a heart that finally turns to Him.

What Ikrimah's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a story like this as a striking before-and-after to admire from a safe distance. But Ikrimah did not live and die so that we could marvel at him. His life is a question put directly to our own iman, and the question is sharp.

The first thing he asks is that we never decide, about ourselves or anyone else, that the door is closed. Here was the heir of the Pharaoh of this ummah, a man who fought the Prophet ﷺ in every battle, who plotted his death to the final hour, who was named among the few from whom mercy was withheld, and Allah still wrote for him an ending of martyrdom and a name honored for fourteen centuries. If Allah could turn that heart, then no sin you have committed is too large for His mercy, and no person you

have given up on is beyond His reach. The verse revealed about his father's brother says it plainly: do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Despair is not humility; it is a quiet insult to how merciful your Lord truly is.

The second thing his life asks is what you will do with the rage and grief you carry. Ikrimah's hatred was not invented; it was inherited from his upbringing and then sharpened by real loss. Many of us carry the same: resentments we were raised into, wounds hardened into something we mistake for our own identity. Ikrimah shows that even a hatred that feels like the core of who you are can be set down, and that the very strength once spent in the wrong direction can become, in the cause of Allah, your greatest asset. The energy is not the problem. Where it is pointed is everything.

And notice how his turning happened. It began in a storm, when he watched men strip away every false attachment and call upon Allah alone, and understood that the One who saves on the sea is the One who saves on the land. That is the heart of tawhid and of sincerity, ikhlas: that worship, hope, and fear belong to Allah alone, not shared with the things we cling to when life is calm. You do not need a storm to learn it. You can choose today to do one act purely for Allah, with no eye on what people will think of it, the way Ikrimah gave away all his inherited wealth without keeping a ledger. And you can let his oath become yours in your own small measure: to spend in obedience something of what you once spent in heedlessness.

Then there is the cup of water. At the very end, with his life draining from his wounds, Ikrimah's instinct was to turn the water toward his brother. That is what a transformed heart does when no one is left to perform for: it gives. Ask yourself honestly

whether, stripped of all witnesses, your reflex would be to reach for the cup or to pass it on. That kind of faith is built in ordinary days, in the small preference of your brother's comfort over your own, long before any battlefield.

So take him into your own ordinary life. Refuse to despair, of your Lord's mercy or of any soul. Turn the strength of your worst feelings toward Him, the way he turned his. And do one thing, today, for the sake of Allah alone, that no one will praise you for. May Allah be pleased with Ikrimah ibn Abi Jahl, who outran his father's name and reached his Lord, and grant us the mercy that reached him, and an ending as good as his own.

This chapter follows the account of Ikrimah ibn Abi Jahl (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (96:9-14, 39:53). Names and places have been rendered in standard seerah spelling, and where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Amr ibn al-As

The Conqueror Who Came Late

There is a kind of man the world produces in every age: too clever to be cornered, too charming to be refused, the one sent into the room when an impossible thing has to be talked into happening. Quraysh prized such a man, and called him Dahiyat al-Arab, the most cunning of the Arabs, the one against whom other men measured their own intelligence. For years he turned all of that gift against the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, hunting the believers across seas and into foreign courts. And then, in the late afternoon of his life, the same cunning was placed in the service of the One who had made it. The story of Amr ibn al-As (may Allah be pleased with him) is the story of what happens when a brilliant man is finally outmatched, and is grateful to lose.

The oldest of the young

Imam al-Dhahabi gathered the praises the Arabs heaped on him: the most cunning of Quraysh, a man of the world, an elegant poet, a horseman and warrior counted among the bravest of his people. He combined nearly everything the Arabs admired in one person, and he knew it. He was older than Umar ibn al-Khattab and used to say he remembered the very night Umar was born. That detail places him precisely. He was not one of the white-haired elders like Abu Jahl who took the Prophet ﷺ as an enemy from the first day, nor one of the youths like Khalid who came later to avenge a fallen father. He stood between the fathers and

the sons, the oldest of the young and the youngest of the old, and he fought the Prophet ﷺ at both Badr and Uhud, which few of his generation did.

Allah was preparing him long before he knew it. Amr was the most traveled merchant of Quraysh: Syria and Palestine and Jordan, Egypt, the land that is now Libya, Abyssinia, Yemen. He knew the roads and the fortresses and the cities of those lands, and had built relationships with their rulers, Roman and Persian alike, in the easy manner of a trader welcome everywhere. Decades later, when he returned not as a merchant but as a general, he already knew the terrain by heart. A childhood spent counting profit was, without his knowing it, a map being drawn for a future he could not yet imagine.

His enmity to the Prophet ﷺ ran deeper than Khalid's. Khalid was a soldier: call him to the battle and he would win it. Amr was a schemer. He plotted, intercepted, and persecuted, in lockstep with his father al-As, whose verses fill the Qur'an as one of the bitterest opponents of the message. When al-As died, undone by the supplication the Prophet ﷺ had made against him, Amr inherited all his wealth, for his only full brother, Hisham, was in prison for the crime of being a Muslim, and would remain in torment for ten years. So Amr carried it all into his fight, and aimed every bit of it at the believers.

The court of the Negus

His cunning has no better stage than Abyssinia. The Prophet ﷺ had sent a band of the most persecuted believers across the sea to seek refuge with the Negus, a Christian king who would not tolerate injustice. Among them were Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, Uthman ibn Affan and the Prophet's daughter Ruqayyah, Umm Salamah, Az-Zubayr; among them too were Amr's own brother Hisham and

a half-brother through his mother. His own kin had fled to escape men like him, and that, somehow, only sharpened his hunger to drag them back.

Quraysh chose him for the extradition, and he came with a strategy. The night before his audience he went from one of the king's confidants to the next with the finest leathers of Arabia, buying their voices in advance. His plan was clean: keep theology out of it. He would simply tell the king these were troublemakers, on neither your religion nor mine, a suspicious people who would sow discord in your land; send them home and we will deal with them. It was anti-refugee talk pitched perfectly to a king's fear of disorder, and Amr delivered it better than any man alive.

The Negus refused to be hurried. "What kind of a man would I be," he said, "if I do not hear their case?" He called the believers. Ja'far rose and gave one of the most beautiful descriptions of Islam ever spoken: that they had been a people of ignorance who worshipped idols, ate carrion, and let the strong devour the weak, until God sent from among them a man of known truthfulness, who commanded them to speak the truth, keep their promises, honor their kin and neighbors, and refrain from bloodshed. The king looked at Amr and said he saw nothing in these people that would let him hand them over, and that whoever harmed them would answer to him.

Amr would not take the loss. His own companion told him to go home, that these were after all their own families and the obsession had become unseemly. Amr answered that he would not leave Abyssinia without all of them in chains. He had found the crack. "They said nothing about Jesus," he told his friend. He would return and say these people blaspheme about the

Messiah, that they call him a mere creature and deny he is the son of God. The king summoned them once more and asked Ja'far what he said about Jesus, son of Mary. Ja'far answered that they said only what God had revealed, and recited the verses of Surah Maryam. The king wept, and his bishops wept until their beards were wet, recognizing the truth in the words. This was the moment the believers later linked to a verse of Surah al-Ma'idah, about the Christians whose hearts soften when they hear the revelation:

and when they listen to what has been sent down to the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears because they recognize the Truth [in it]. They say, 'Our Lord, we believe, so count us amongst the witnesses.'

QUR'AN 5:83

The king took a stick and drew a line on the ground. By God, he said, Jesus does not exceed what you have said by the length of this twig. The bribed generals grunted; even if you grunt, the king told them, these people are protected, and whoever harms them will answer to me. Then he turned to Amr and dismissed him. Amr had failed for the first time in his life. He sailed home empty-handed, and the people of Mecca whispered that if even Amr could not bring them back, then surely this Muhammad ﷺ truly received revelation, for no one had ever slipped through his hands. He poured his rage upon his brother Hisham and the captured believers, fought at Badr, commanded a flank at Uhud, and helped architect the great army that came to wipe out Madinah at the trench of Khandaq and was turned back by the wind and the will of Allah.

The verse that answered a prayer

Somewhere in those years the Prophet ﷺ raised his hands and supplicated against Amr. Such prayers had undone other men. But here Allah answered His Prophet not with a punishment but with a revelation, gently lifting Amr's fate out of human hands:

Whether God relents towards them or punishes them is not for you [Prophet] to decide: they are wrongdoers.

QUR'AN 3:128

It was not yet Amr's time, and it was not the Prophet's decision to make. There was a plan for this difficult man. And his brother Hisham, tortured into renouncing his faith and sure he had ruined himself forever, was among those for whom the verse came down telling the despairing servant never to lose hope in the mercy of Allah. Two brothers, two doors held open when both looked, from the outside, firmly shut.

The change came after Khandaq. Amr saw the way the wind was blowing, gathered a few trusted friends from Quraysh, and said plainly that Muhammad ﷺ seemed to be winning. His plan had a strange poetry to it: let them go to the Negus and become the refugees this time, as the Muslims once had. If Quraysh prevailed, they could slip back to Mecca and pretend none of it had happened; but if Muhammad ﷺ prevailed, to live under the Negus was far better than to face what the Prophet ﷺ might do to men like them. So they loaded the finest gifts and sailed.

In the palace Amr saw a man he recognized: Amr ibn Umayyah, the Prophet's own envoy. His old arrogance flared, and he pressed the king for permission to kill the messenger then and there. The Negus struck him so hard across the face that he nearly broke his nose. Wake up, the blow said. Amr wished the earth would swallow him. And then the king spoke the words that

broke him open: you ask me to hand over the envoy of the man to whom comes the very angel that used to come to Moses.

That language was a key turning in a lock. Years earlier Waraqah ibn Nawfal had used the same words to the Prophet ﷺ after the first revelation: this is the Namus, the one who came to Moses. The Negus read the same scriptures and reached for the same phrase, and faith struck Amr in that instant. He had watched the Prophet ﷺ for years and felt nothing; now this learned king swore sincere counsel: go back and follow him, for Allah will give him victory as He gave Moses victory over Pharaoh. Then take my pledge to Islam on his behalf, Amr said. And so the Negus, who never met the Prophet ﷺ, became the only man of the second generation in history to receive the pledge of Islam from a future companion. He extended his hand, and Amr took it.

The last of the emigrants

He slipped away from his sleeping companions in the night and rode for Madinah. In the desert he met two riders, Khalid ibn al-Walid and Uthman ibn Talha, also on their way to surrender to the Prophet ﷺ. Where are you going, Abu Sulayman, Amr asked. To become Muslim, Khalid answered; this man is a prophet, I no longer have any doubt. Then by God, said Amr, so am I. The sons of the men who had fought the Prophet ﷺ hardest were riding to lay down their swords. They reached Madinah, and the Prophet ﷺ received them with open joy, knowing they came this time not to strike him but to embrace him.

When his turn came to give the pledge, Amr the diplomat pulled his hand back. He would take it, he said, on the condition that all his past sins be forgiven; and, with rare honesty, would not ask the same for whatever sins lay ahead. The Prophet ﷺ did not grant him a personal exception. He told him something better: do

you not know that Islam erases all that came before it, and the migration erases all before it, and an accepted Hajj erases all before it? It was already in the contract. Amr did not need a favor; he needed only to enter the door that mercy had already opened. Remember his fear of the sins still to come. It will return at the very end of his life.

Doubts could be raised: did he believe, or was he merely a clever man reading the odds? The Prophet ﷺ settled it himself. The two sons of al-As, he said, are two believers, and Amr a man rightly guided in his affairs. And in the most beautiful testimony of all: the people became Muslim, but Amr ibn al-As truly believed. When an alarm once sounded at the edge of the city and Amr, with Salim the freedman of Abu Hudhayfah, rushed out to defend it, the Prophet ﷺ asked, would you not do as these two believers have done? The hardest heart in Quraysh had become one of the first to run toward danger for the sake of Allah.

His proving came fast, at a small expedition called Dhat al-Salasil, where the Prophet ﷺ sent him as a commander and said Allah would grant him victory and spoils. Amr bristled at the word. By God, he said, I did not become Muslim for wealth, but out of desire for Islam and to be with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. How excellent, the Prophet ﷺ answered, is honest wealth in the hand of a righteous man. That a man might fear wealth would stain his sincerity was itself the measure of how far his heart had traveled.

Consider, too, what the Prophet ﷺ entrusted to him only weeks into Islam: command of three hundred, among them Abu Bakr and Umar, and even the seasoned Abu Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrah submitted to him for the sake of unity. On a freezing night, fearing he would die if he bathed in the cold, Amr led the prayer

without a full washing, and when questioned recited the words of Allah:

Do not kill each other, for God is merciful to you.

QUR'AN 4:29

The Prophet ﷺ laughed and let it pass. Amr was being grown, and the men around him, into something larger than their pride.

A heart learning to love

What is most moving about this period is not the conquests but the softening. Amr, the man who once schemed against the Prophet ﷺ, now could barely raise his eyes to him. I was so shy before the Messenger of Allah ﷺ out of awe and love, he said, that I never filled my eyes with looking at him. The cunning had not vanished, but it was being purified, turned outward into generosity. On a journey the Prophet ﷺ said three times, may Allah have mercy on Amr; and when asked why, he explained that whenever he called the people to give in charity, Amr would come and give all that he had, and when asked where it came from, would answer, from Allah. The man who had inherited a fortune from an enemy of God was now emptying it into the cause of God and crediting none of it to himself. The Prophet ﷺ trusted him as governor of Oman, where many embraced Islam under him, for the believers compelled no one; there is no compulsion in religion. He stayed there until the Prophet ﷺ passed from this world.

From Rafah to Egypt

After the Prophet ﷺ, under Umar, Amr came fully into his own. It was not fitting, Umar said, for Amr ibn al-As to walk the earth

except as a leader. While Khalid drove into the Persian empire, Amr drove into the Roman; most of southern Palestine fell to him, all the land below Jerusalem, secured so that Umar himself could come and take the keys of the holy city in peace. There he met his match in cunning, Artabun, the cleverest of the Romans, and outwitted him too.

Then he set his eyes on Egypt. Umar was wary: the Romans and Persians were enough; leave Egypt alone. Amr answered that he had four thousand men against a hundred and twenty thousand, but that he had a plan, and he understood its people: the Coptic Christians of Egypt, despised by their Byzantine rulers and resentful of them. And so this companion stationed himself at the very edge of the two worlds, in Gaza, and in Rafah; the letters between him and Umar passed from Rafah to Madinah. On that ground that aches in our hearts today, the companions camped and negotiated. Amr told the Egyptians that the Prophet ﷺ had foretold that Allah would one day open Egypt to them, and had commanded that they be treated with kindness, for they were kin through Hajar, the mother of Ismail.

He received Umar's letter to halt only after he had crossed into Egypt, as he had arranged, so that he might say truthfully it had reached him too late. With his four thousand he took Alexandria, and the Byzantines fled. Many Egyptians embraced Islam, drawn by a justice the histories record with wonder, so unlike the rule they had known. Where his army's tents had stood, Amr built the city of Fustat, the city of tents, which the centuries would absorb into what we now call old Cairo. Companions filled its neighborhoods, and raised there a mosque that still bears his name. A man who had spent his youth fighting the believers ended it building a city where the believers prayed.

What Amr's life asks of our faith

Amr ibn al-As died past the age of ninety, and the most important thing he ever did, he did on that deathbed. His son Abdullah sat beside him, and Amr divided his life into three parts. In the first, he said, I fought the Prophet ﷺ, and had I died then I would surely have been among the people of the Fire. In the second I embraced Islam and was at his side, and had I died then I would have been certain of Paradise. But this last part, the years of politics and trial and the mistakes I made, of this I know nothing. His son reminded him how the Prophet ﷺ had loved him, but Amr would not lean on it: perhaps, he said, the Prophet ﷺ only drew me close to soften my hard heart. Then he raised his finger to the sky and repeated, there is no god but Allah, there is no god but Allah, until the words carried him out of this world.

Here is what his life asks of you. It asks you to believe that no past is too far gone for Allah's mercy to reach. This was the most cunning enemy the Prophet ﷺ had, who fought at Badr and Uhud and built the army of Khandaq, and the Prophet ﷺ told him to his face: Islam erases all that came before it. If you carry a history that whispers you are beyond forgiveness, Amr is the standing refutation of that whisper. The door that mercy held open for him has not closed.

It asks you about your sincerity. Wounded that anyone might suppose he had come for wealth, Amr said he had become Muslim not for money but out of desire for Islam and to be near the Messenger of Allah ﷺ; then, called to give in charity, he gave everything and named no source but Allah. Ask yourself, plainly, what you are for. Is your worship for Allah, or for the way it makes you appear? Could you, like Amr, give away what you cherish and say only, it is from Allah, wanting nothing back from the people who watched you give it?

And it asks you to hold, at once, both hope and fear of Him. Amr did not die boasting of his conquests. He died trembling, dividing his life honestly, clinging with his last breath to la ilaha illa Allah. That is the balance the believer is meant to walk: to hope in Allah's mercy without growing careless, and to fear His justice without despairing. A man who had conquered Egypt feared for his soul. How then should we, who have conquered nothing, carry ourselves before our Lord, except in humility, returning to Him with that same word on our tongues?

So take something small and real from him into this very day. Give one thing in charity that no one will trace back to you, and answer in your own heart, it is from Allah. Make tawbah for the part of your life you are least proud of, and believe it is accepted, because Islam erases what came before it. And keep close the last word he reached for, repeating la ilaha illa Allah until it is the most familiar thing on your tongue, so that whenever your own final moment comes, your finger too is pointing at the sky. May Allah be pleased with Amr ibn al-As, forgive him the years he himself was unsure of, and grant us a return to Him as sincere, and an ending as certain, as the one he prayed for.

This chapter follows the account of Amr ibn al-As (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (5:83, 3:128, 4:29). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Hisham ibn al-As (and the House of al-As)

The Brother Who Went First

There are men whose names fill the history books, and there are men whose names are almost lost inside the stories of others. This chapter is about one of the second kind. Before we ever arrive at the famous Amr ibn al-As (may Allah be pleased with him), the brilliant general who would one day carry Islam into Egypt, we have to sit with the family that made him: a father who became one of the most hated men in the eyes of Allah, and a younger brother, Hisham (may Allah be pleased with him), who believed early, suffered long, and was loved more in heaven than he was ever known on earth.

The title given to this story is a wicked father and a "better" brother, and the word "better" is in quotation marks on purpose. By the end, it will make sense who decided that question, and how.

A house divided by two mothers

Amr and Hisham were the only two sons of al-As ibn Wa'il, and they were half-brothers. Amr's mother was a slave woman named Layla bint Harmalah. Hisham's mother was a woman of high rank, Umm Harmalah bint Hisham ibn al-Mughirah, and her brother was none other than Abu Jahl, the chief of Banu Makhzum. That single fact pulled the whole family into the center

of Quraysh. Through his mother, Hisham was a nephew of Abu Jahl and a cousin of Khalid ibn al-Walid (may Allah be pleased with him). Through his father, he belonged to Banu Sahm, another powerful clan of Makkah.

So this was a family of chiefs and warriors, of lineage and wealth, the kind of house that finds its pride in exactly those two things and almost nothing else. And it would be split straight down the middle. The favored son of a powerful mother would walk away from all of it and follow the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The father would spend the last decade of his life raging against the very message his son had embraced.

The father: a wealth that fed on the weak

To understand Hisham, you first have to understand what he refused to become.

Al-As ibn Wa'il was one of the wealthiest men in Makkah, and he used that wealth as a weapon against people who could not fight back. The Prophet ﷺ once said that people are like precious stones: the best of you in the days of ignorance are the best of you in Islam. The reverse is also true. Some men carried their lowest qualities straight into their opposition to the message, and only grew worse with them. Al-As was such a man.

There is a scene from before Islam that tells you everything. A trader came up from Yemen, from the tribe of Zubayd, to sell his goods in Makkah during the sacred months. He had no clan in the city to protect him. He sold some of his goods to al-As, and when he came to collect his payment, al-As simply refused. Go claim your money somewhere else, he was told. Who are you to demand anything here. The Yemeni man stood before the Kaaba and shamed the whole city with his poetry: is this how the

custodians of the sacred house treat the stranger and the weak? It was not righteousness that moved Makkah, it was embarrassment. But an uncle of the Prophet ﷺ, al-Zubayr ibn Abd al-Muttalib, was genuinely outraged, and out of that incident came the famous Hilf al-Fudul, the Pact of the Virtuous, in which the tribes swore to protect anyone wronged among them. The Prophet ﷺ, still a young man, was a party to that pact and honored it for the rest of his life. So al-As had been the catalyst for something noble, by being the villain of it.

When Islam came, that same instinct for cruelty turned a particular way. Al-As was clever, witty, sharp-tongued, and his chosen weapon against the Prophet ﷺ was not the sword. It was mockery. Istihza. He is one of the men the scholars name again and again in the books of tafsir as the target of verse after verse: the one who demanded an angel be sent down, the one who scoffed that he would only pay his debts "in the Garden," the one who carried a rotted bone to the Prophet ﷺ, crumbled it in the air, and sneered. The Qur'an answers that bone directly:

Can man not see that We created him from a drop of fluid? Yet- lo and behold!- he disputes openly, producing arguments against Us, forgetting his own creation. He says, 'Who can give life back to bones after they have decayed?' Say, 'He who created them in the first place will give them life again: He has full knowledge of every act of creation.

QUR'AN 36:77-79

His mockery reached its cruelest edge with the weak Muslims. When Khabbab ibn al-Aratt (may Allah be pleased with him), a blacksmith and a slave, came to collect payment for a sword he had forged, al-As told him he would not pay a single coin until

Khabbab disbelieved in Muhammad ﷺ. Khabbab answered that he would not disbelieve, not in life, not in death, not even on the Day he was raised again. Al-As laughed at the very idea of being raised, and then said the words that would be recorded forever: you claim there is gold and silver in the Garden, so I will pay you there. Allah answered him in a passage that turned his boast into his sentence:

Have you considered the man who rejects Our revelation, who says, 'I will certainly be given wealth and children'? Has he penetrated the unknown or received a pledge to that effect from the Lord of Mercy? No! We shall certainly record what he says and prolong his punishment: We shall inherit from him all that he speaks of and he will come to Us all alone.

QUR'AN 19:77-80

He was the one, too, who called the Prophet ﷺ al-abtar, "the cut off," because the Prophet ﷺ had buried his sons and had no male heir to carry his name. When he died, al-As said, his memory will be forgotten. Surah al-Kawthar came down in answer, and history settled the matter so completely that there is no need to argue it: the most mentioned name on the face of the earth is Muhammad ﷺ.

The thorn

In the worst days of the persecution, when the Muslims were being starved and broken, al-As and Abu Jahl chased the Prophet ﷺ down one day to mock him, and Abu Talib was no longer alive to shield him. After hearing their insults, the Prophet ﷺ made a very particular supplication against al-As. He did not pray for him to be struck down with something great. He asked

Allah to give a thorn, one of the small thorns of the earth, power over him.

The dua was answered in a way that matched the smallness of it exactly. Al-As stepped on a thorn. The wound became infected, his legs failed him, his body began to rot and swell, and he was left bedridden. His son Amr, still a disbeliever then, raced toward Ta'if looking for a physician who could save his father. By the time he returned, al-As was dead, his body swollen and ruined. A man of vast wealth, undone by the least thing in creation. He came to Allah all alone, exactly as the verse had said.

The scholars note that Allah does not even name these men in the Qur'an. He leaves them as a category rather than a person, partly because there is an al-As in every generation, wearing different clothes, and partly as a dismissal: you are too low to be named, you are simply fuel, like the mockers who came before you and the mockers who will come after.

The brother who went first

Now look at what Allah did with the family of the man who called the Prophet ﷺ "cut off."

His two sons, his only two sons, the very name he was so afraid of losing, both became Muslim, and both carried the name of Muhammad ﷺ to the ends of the earth. The Prophet ﷺ said of them, the two sons of al-As are two believers, Amr and Hisham. The man who mocked the Prophet ﷺ for having no future watched his future walk into Islam.

And the one who went first was Hisham. He embraced Islam so early that he was among the believers of Dar al-Arqam, that first secret house of faith, long before his older brother Amr. He had been, by Amr's own admission, the more beloved of the two sons

to their father, partly because his mother was a woman of rank. That is part of what poisoned al-As: it was his favorite child who slipped away to the Prophet ﷺ. Hisham took the kunya Abu al-As, after his father. But the Prophet ﷺ, who had a habit of turning bad names into good ones, noticed what the name al-As actually means: the disobedient one. The name fit the father. So the Prophet ﷺ renamed him Abu Muti', the father of the obedient one. He never had a son to carry it; it simply became his name, a quiet correction stitched into history.

His own household tortured him. The elites of Makkah did not flog their own children in the open the way they flogged Bilal and the slaves; they did it privately, behind their own walls, and al-As tried everything to break his son's faith. Amr took part in it too. In the end Hisham fled with the believers in the second migration to Abyssinia, while Amr, still an enemy of Islam, was the very man sent to Najashi to demand the refugees be handed back. Picture that: Amr standing before the king, arguing that this was only a domestic dispute, give us back our runaways, while his own brother stood among the believers he was trying to drag home. Amr was clever, and he tried hard, and by the grace of Allah he failed.

Ten years in the dark

Then came the part of Hisham's life that asks the hardest question of all.

A rumor reached Abyssinia that the elites of Makkah had embraced Islam, that it was safe to return. It was not true, but about forty of the believers set out for home, and Hisham was among them. The moment he reached Makkah he was seized, and the persecution this time was worse than before. He was imprisoned in what amounted to a dungeon, an abandoned

house, and left there for roughly ten years. He missed Badr. He missed Uhud. He missed the Trench. Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that they would beat a man until he could not even sit up on his own, then ask, between the blows: are Lat and Uzza gods besides Allah? They beat and starved him until, at last, his tongue gave out and he said the words they wanted, even as his heart stayed full of faith.

That is the wound underneath the wound. It was not only the body. Hisham, and others forced to utter words of disbelief under torture, came to believe they were now beyond forgiveness, that the words had damned them no matter how their hearts had recoiled. His own cousin Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) had planned to make the Hijrah to Madinah together with Hisham and a third man; they agreed to meet at dawn on the edge of Makkah, and if one did not appear, the others were to assume he had been caught and go on. Hisham did not appear. He had been taken by his own family, by his brother Amr, and by men of Banu Sahm.

And then the verse came down, and Umar, one of the few who could write, copied it out with his own hand and had it smuggled into Makkah:

Say, '[God says], My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of God's mercy. God forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.

QUR'AN 39:53

Hisham said that when Umar's letter reached him with that verse, he carried it out into a valley on the edge of the city, and he read it over and over, begging Allah to let him understand, asking

whether it could possibly be meant for him. And he understood. Allah was telling them they could still come back. All those years in the dark, the Prophet ﷺ had been making dua for them by name, asking Allah to deliver Hisham and the others left behind in Makkah.

Carried out on someone's back

After the Battle of the Trench, the Prophet ﷺ turned to the companions and asked, who will go and bring back these two men for us, Ayyash and Hisham, it has been too long. It was the most dangerous mission imaginable. The man who stood up was al-Walid ibn al-Walid (may Allah be pleased with him), the brother of Khalid, who had accepted Islam long before Khalid did. He slipped into Makkah in disguise, into the very city where his own brother Khalid was still an enemy who would have cut him to pieces if he were caught. He tracked the movements of the city until he spotted a woman carrying food toward the prisoners, followed her to the dungeon, waited for night, created a distraction, broke in, and cut the chains. The two men were so weak they could not stand. He lifted them both onto his animal and rode for Madinah. On the way he tore a finger badly, and it would not stop bleeding, and he is remembered for the verse of poetry he spoke about it: you are nothing but a finger that bled, and what you met was only in the path of Allah.

So Hisham came at last to Madinah, one of the few who made both migrations, to Abyssinia and then to Madinah, having lost a decade of his life to torture and never once turning bitter against his Lord. There is a narration from the two brothers, in Muslim and in the Musnad of Ahmad, of a day they called the best gathering they ever had with the Prophet ﷺ: they came upon young men arguing over the meanings of verses, setting one part

of the Qur'an against another, and the brothers held back, sensing the Prophet ﷺ would not be pleased with it. He came out with anger plain on his face and said the nations before them were destroyed by exactly this, by quarreling over the Book and striking its verses against one another. Then he gave them a measure for the rest of their lives: whatever of the Book you understand, act by it, and whatever you cannot, simply believe in it. The brothers were glad all their days that they had been the two who held back.

There is one more detail that captures who Hisham was. Despite everything, al-As had left instructions in his will to free a hundred slaves. Hisham freed fifty of them on his father's behalf, then went to ask Amr to free the rest. The Prophet ﷺ told them the truth of it plainly: had their father been a believer, their charity and their freeing of slaves on his behalf would have reached him, but as it was, the deeds were theirs and not his. Al-As was beyond their reach. Yet the scene shows you the heart of the son, willing to do good even in the shadow of a father like that.

What Hisham's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read this story as a tale of two men getting what they deserved, the mocker brought low by a thorn, the believer carried home in triumph. But the deeper question is not about them. It is about what we believe concerning Allah when we cannot see how the story ends.

Hisham spent ten years in a dungeon. He missed every great day the others lived. He was beaten until he broke, and then he was tormented by the fear that the breaking had cost him his salvation. From inside that cell, there was no visible reason to keep trusting Allah. And the verse that reached him is the same one that reaches us: do not despair of the mercy of Allah, He

forgives all sins. That is the first thing his life asks of your faith. There is no sin so large, no failure so complete, no decade so wasted, that the door of return is shut. If despair is whispering to you that you have gone too far, that whisper is not from Allah. It is the same lie that nearly broke Hisham, answered by the same mercy.

The second thing his life asks is harder, because it concerns the unfairness we can all see in the world right now. Al-As mocked, stole, and oppressed for years while he sat on his wealth, and the believers starved. If you had stood in Makkah in those years, you might have wondered whether Allah was watching at all. He was. He has a plan for the mockers and a plan for the mocked, a plan for the oppressors and a plan for the oppressed, and the man who called the Prophet ﷺ "cut off" died alone and rotting while his own beloved sons carried the Prophet's name across the world. Do not lose faith in Allah when you see the wicked prosper and the faithful suffer. That is not the end of the story. It is the middle of it, and Allah does not abandon the middle.

But the truest lesson is in the title. Years later, Amr ibn al-As, by then one of the most famous men in Islam, was making tawaf when he heard young men debating which of the two brothers was better, the celebrated Amr or his lesser-known brother Hisham. Amr sat down with them, lowered his head, and answered the question himself. The night before the battle of Yarmuk, he said, my brother and I prayed together that Allah would accept us as martyrs. Allah took him and left me. He is better than me. Hisham had fought at Ajnadayn, where, when the Muslims faltered, he tore off his helmet and called out, Muslims, are you fleeing from the Garden? He plunged into the lines and they followed him, and it turned the battle. At Yarmuk he was martyred, his body cut to pieces, and Amr walked the field

afterward gathering the parts of his only brother to bury in a single grave. When the news reached Umar, he said, may Allah have mercy on my brother Hisham, what a great supporter he was to Islam.

Here is what that asks of you. Hisham was not seeking to be in the history books. He was not seeking to be discussed in study circles or remembered by name. He was seeking his name with Allah, and so he was content to go first into the prison, first into the migration, first onto the battlefield, and first into martyrdom, while the fame went to others. That is ikhlas, sincerity, the rarest and most valuable thing a believer owns: to do the work for Allah alone and not need the world to know your name. Ask yourself how much of what you do is bent toward the eyes of people, and how much you could do the way Hisham did it, in a dungeon no one saw, on a battlefield where the credit went to someone else, content that Allah was watching.

So take one thing from him into your ordinary life. Refuse to despair of Allah's mercy, no matter what you have done. Trust His promise to the oppressed even when the wicked seem to be winning. And do one good deed today that no one will ever credit to your name, for Allah alone, the way the brother who went first lived his whole short life. May Allah be pleased with Hisham, and with his brother Amr, and with al-Walid who carried him home, and may He write our names with Him as He wrote theirs, even if the world never learns them at all.

This chapter follows the account of the family of Amr ibn al-As (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (36:77-79,

19:77-80, 39:53). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Khalid ibn al-Walid

The Sword of Allah

There is a kind of man the world only ever knows as a weapon. He is feared from across a battlefield, named in the threats of empires, studied long after he is gone for the way he could turn ten thousand men in the desert and never lose. Khalid ibn al-Walid (may Allah be pleased with him) was that man. He fought somewhere near a hundred campaigns and was never once defeated, and the generals of Rome and Persia learned his name the way you learn the name of a storm. But the story worth telling is not how he won. It is what happened inside him after he became a Muslim, when the same sword that had cut against the Prophet ﷺ was laid at the Prophet's feet, and a proud, violent man had to be slowly remade into a servant of God.

To understand the legend, you have to watch him learn.

The sword crosses over

He had been one of the most dangerous men in Arabia long before Islam, the cavalry commander whose flanking charge broke the Muslims at Uhud. He had ridden out from Makkah again and again to harm the believers, plotted against the Prophet ﷺ, stood on the side of those who wanted the message dead. And then, before the conquest of Makkah, after dreams that unsettled him and a long inner struggle, he came to Madinah

and gave his allegiance, and everything reversed. The same hands now carried a banner for the very man he had hunted.

When the Prophet ﷺ moved on Makkah, he did not enter with one army. He divided the believers into four columns approaching from four directions, one under Ali, one under az-Zubair, one under Khalid, and one under Abu Ubaidah ibn al-Jarrah (may Allah be pleased with them), the column the Prophet ﷺ himself rode with. The Prophet ﷺ wanted the city taken with as little blood as the situation allowed, and there was a quiet worry attached to Khalid, because everyone knew his one language was the sword. Negotiation, diplomacy, the patient holding back of a hand, these were not yet in his vocabulary.

It was Khalid's column that was ambushed at the edge of Makkah, by Safwan ibn Umayya, his own brother-in-law, and Ikrimah ibn Abi Jahl, his closest friend from the days before Islam. Khalid did not flinch. He scattered them, killed about a dozen, and sent the rest fleeing from the area entirely. When word reached the Prophet ﷺ, he was at first displeased, because this was not the entry he had envisioned. But when he was told that Khalid's men had been attacked first, he said, "Qada Allah khair," the decree of Allah is better. No blame fell on Khalid. He had not begun it.

Learning to rein in the sword

The early mistakes were real, and the histories do not hide them, and we should not rush past them either, because they are where his greatness was forged.

The Prophet ﷺ sent him to the tribe of Banu Jadhimah, a tribe Khalid had personally feuded with before Islam, a tribe that had once killed an uncle of his and killed the father of Abdur-Rahman

ibn Awf. He invited them to Islam. They answered with an old word, "Saba'na," we have changed our religion, which could mean they had accepted Islam or had merely turned from idols. They kept their weapons. He told them to lay them down; they hesitated; and Khalid, quick to his sword, attacked. Some of them had become Muslim. It was a grave error in the early days of the faith.

When the news reached the Prophet ﷺ, he turned toward the Kaaba and said, "Allahumma inni abra'u ilayka mimma sana'a Khalid," O Allah, I disown before You what Khalid has done. He sent Ali to that tribe to make right what could be made right, to pay for the blood and the loss. And here is the thing to hold onto. The Prophet ﷺ disavowed the act, and corrected it fully, and he did not break the man. He did not discard Khalid for the mistake. He moved him toward growth. Abdur-Rahman ibn Awf came to Khalid and accused him: you struck them because you still carried the grudge of your uncle, there is still some of the old ignorance, the jahiliyyah, left in you. The Arabs of old would avenge a slaughtered camel forty years later by wiping out a tribe, and that poison had to be drained out, person by person. Khalid argued back, even threw it in his face that the tribe had killed Abdur-Rahman's father too. And it was around this tension that the Prophet ﷺ gave one of his most humbling words: do not curse my companions, for if one of you spent gold equal to the mountain of Uhud, you would not reach the measure of one of them, nor even half of it.

He was telling Khalid plainly: you are not yet at the rank of those who came before you. Show them respect. Make space for the new without diminishing the old. And the Qur'an itself had drawn the same line between the early believers and the latecomers:

Why should you not give for God's cause when God alone will inherit what is in the heavens and earth? Those who gave and fought before the triumph are not like others: they are greater in rank than those who gave and fought afterwards. But God has promised a good reward to all of them: God is fully aware of all that you do.

QUR'AN 57:10

What is striking is what Khalid did with the correction. His mistakes belong only to the early days. He never repeated them. He grew out of them and then climbed higher, raising the bar of his own conduct, while the Prophet ﷺ kept finding ways to honour him and bind him close. When the Prophet ﷺ shaved his head at the Farewell Pilgrimage, he kept some of his blessed hair and sent it to Khalid, the kind of gift reserved for those most beloved. Khalid kept it. We will see, at the very end of his life, what that gift came to mean to him.

The growth of the man behind the sword

He did not only sharpen as a soldier. He softened as a believer, and the histories preserve small, telling scenes of it.

When Khalid felt one of the jinn was plotting against him, he came to the Prophet ﷺ, who taught him to seek refuge in the perfect words of Allah, which no righteous person nor corrupt one can surpass, from the evil of all that He created and scattered in the earth, from the evil of every visitor of the night except the one who comes with good. He learned the supplications. He learned to make his remembrance of Allah a shield. The man who once knew only the sword was now arming himself with the names of God.

And the new ethics took root in him in ways that won the trust of the very companions who had once doubted him. There is a chapter in the books of hadith about property lost in battle and later recovered by the Muslims, and in it Abdullah ibn Umar reports that he once lost a horse, seized in war. Years later, when Khalid defeated that enemy and found the horse among the spoils, he recognised it and returned it to its owner. The man feared for his quickness to strike had become a man careful with what belonged to others. The sword was being governed.

The right man for the army

When does such a man finally shine? On the battlefield, and the one who first set him over the Muslim army was Abu Bakr as-Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him), and that choice alone is a testimony to Khalid's worth. Abu Bakr sent him to fight the wars of apostasy, against the false prophets who rose after the Prophet ﷺ died, and Khalid crushed the worst of them, Musaylimah the liar, at the Battle of Yamamah, and broke pocket after pocket of rebellion threatening the young community.

When people warned Abu Bakr about Khalid's reputation, that he was too quick to his sword, Abu Bakr answered with the calm of a man who had already made his account before God. He said: if my Lord asks me on the Day of Judgement why I placed Khalid over the army, I will say, I heard Your servant and Your beloved, Muhammad ﷺ, say, "Khalid is a sword from the swords of Allah, drawn against the disbelievers." Abu Bakr had weighed it. He had his answer ready before Allah. Khalid, for all his youth in the faith and his early stumbles, was the right commander.

A hundred battles, never a face-to-face fight

What made him the most brilliant commander the field has ever seen was not raw courage. Plenty of men were brave. It was that he never gave the same battle twice. Every campaign carried some trick he had never used before, so that no enemy could ever read him. He almost never met an army head-on. He always had something hidden.

Against the Persians at the Battle of the Chains, the commander Hormuz brought twenty thousand men, many of them literally chained at the leg to one another so they could not break and run, an immovable wall meant to overwhelm by sheer mass. Khalid had written to him first with the offer he carried to every enemy: accept Islam and be safe, or pay the tribute and be protected, or face the consequences. And he had added a line that became famous, that he was bringing them a people who love death as much as you love life. Hormuz laughed it off; these were the desert Arabs Quraysh had once been a mere client to. So Khalid did not fight him. He marched to a false position, then vanished, then appeared at another, then doubled back, a game of peekaboo across the desert that left the chained Persians staggering after a phantom, exhausted, sleepless, paranoid about where he would surface next. When Persia tried to cut off the Euphrates to leave them dying of thirst, Khalid told his men to trust in Allah, and rain fell and filled their water skins. By the time the armies met, the Muslims were outnumbered but fresh, and the Persians were spent.

Hormuz, wanting a grand gesture, challenged Khalid to a duel and set three of his best men to rush in and kill him once the fighting began. Khalid accepted, because he never backed down, but he was not a fool. When the three men charged, Khalid was so strong that he seized Hormuz and used the man's own body as a shield until help arrived, and then he killed him. To lose your

general in the opening duel is a death blow to morale, and the chained army collapsed soon after. They brought back the spoils to Madinah, and among them, for the first time, the city saw an elephant.

He moved through Iraq the same way, always with a different tactic. At one fort he brought a thousand archers and gave a single command, take out the eyes, until it was remembered as the Battle of the Eyes. He learned that the Persian armies hung their morale on their generals, so he hunted the generals first. He read the land, the wells, the horses, the seasons, and planned a hundred days past the fight before it had even begun. He favoured a thin line stretched wide, with a single deep column hidden, so the enemy never knew where the real blow would land. Rome and Persia, who had fought each other for seven hundred years, grew so unsettled by this one man that they quietly agreed to pause their own ancient war and deal with the nuisance in the middle.

The desert no army had crossed

Then came the order that became, in itself, one of the marvels of his life. The companions in Syria were under heavy pressure from Rome, and Abu Bakr wrote to Khalid in Iraq: turn toward Syria, and hurry. Khalid asked his guide, Rafi ibn Umayrah, for the fastest route. Rafi offered the known roads. Khalid wanted the one no army had ever taken, fast and unreadable. There is one, Rafi said, but there is no water on it for over a hundred miles, the terrain is brutal, no army has ever marched it, you may lose your men. Khalid answered with two words that defined him: "Tawakkalna ala Allah," we have put our trust in Allah. That is the road we take.

So he had the camels drink their fill, then kept them from grazing, and three days into the waterless waste, when his men were spent, the camels were slaughtered and the water stored in their bodies was drawn out to keep the army alive. When they reached the place where Rafi remembered a small spring under a thorn tree, and could not find it, the Muslims dug at the roots and the water came up, and they raised their voices in takbir. He always had a solution. Picture being a believer in those years and marching behind a commander unshaken by anything on earth.

When he reached Abu Ubaidah ibn al-Jarrah, that gentle, trustworthy companion smiled with relief and told him, I received the letter that you would come, and there is no resentment in my heart; we are glad to serve under you. Khalid praised him in return, because Abu Ubaidah never schemed for his own glory, never wrote to claim he had it handled, but only ever thought of what served the Muslims.

At Ajnadayn, in the valley where it is said David once faced Goliath, about thirty thousand Muslims stood against ninety thousand Romans. The night before, the men woke to find Khalid gone, and found him alone, with no guard, calmly scouting the enemy camp in the dark. They begged him to stop risking himself. He answered: did you not hear that the Prophet ﷺ said the one who remembers Allah and the one who does not are like the living and the dead? They said yes. Then, he said, what can tens of thousands of dead men do to one living man? My remembrance of Allah is my shield. The Roman commander, before the battle, offered him money and robes to take his hungry Arabs and go home, certain they had come only out of poverty. Khalid answered that they had not come out of hunger, and turned the man's contempt back on him with cold nerve, and then he won.

The greatest test was not a battle

While the Muslims were fighting for Damascus, Abu Bakr passed away, and Umar became the leader of the believers. Umar sent a letter appointing Abu Ubaidah as commander of the army, replacing Khalid. Abu Ubaidah received it in the middle of the battle, and, ever the one who thought first of the community, he held the letter back so it would not shake the army, let Khalid finish and win, and only then came to him, almost embarrassed, and read it out.

Why did Umar do it? Not out of any hatred, whatever later writers have claimed. Would al-Faruq, who pressed his own face to the ground for the sake of Allah, risk the whole community over a personal grudge? Umar's reason was given plainly: a dangerous aura had grown around Khalid, a belief that victory came through him, that with Khalid present they could not lose. Even a Roman commander had asked him whether it was true that a sword had descended from heaven and been given to him, as if he were something more than a man. Umar feared the believers would be tested through him, that they would start trusting in Khalid instead of in Allah. The faith of the Muslims mattered more than any battle won or lost. Victory comes from Allah, never from a sword.

And here is the moment that proves the man was truly remade. The Khalid of the days of ignorance would have raised an uproar at being demoted before the world. He had the loyalty and the genius to break away, to take men with him, to become a fitnah for the community. Instead, when the letter was read, he said simply, we hear and we obey, I will accept any position you give me. He served under Abu Ubaidah without a trace of bitterness, was elevated again as an adviser and field commander, and the two of them together, the diplomat and the sword, accomplished

what neither could alone. When Abu Ubaidah once hesitated even to give him an order, Khalid told him, if you appointed a child over me, I would hear and obey. That obedience, that surrender of his own ego to the cause of Allah, is a greater thing than any of his hundred victories.

At Yarmuk, in the year 636, perhaps the most decisive battle in the whole history of Islam, twenty-five thousand Muslims broke a Roman army of a hundred thousand. In the thick of it Khalid's helmet fell, and this careful general suddenly threw himself recklessly through the ranks to recover it, against all his usual caution. Afterward, when they asked why he had risked so much for a helmet, he told them he kept the Prophet's hair, the gift from the Farewell Pilgrimage, sewn into the front of it. He had not been fighting for the metal. He had been protecting what he had of the Prophet ﷺ.

What Khalid's life asks of our faith

Khalid died in his bed in Hims, sick, far from the battlefield he had given his life to, and it tormented him. He pulled back his sleeve for the men who came to him and made them look: a hundred campaigns, he said, and there is not a hand's breadth of my body without the mark of a sword, an arrow, or a spear, and now I die in my bed like a camel. May the eyes of the cowards never sleep. One of those present reminded him of the name the Prophet ﷺ had given him: you can break every sword in battle, but you are the sword of Allah, and the sword of Allah will not be broken. He died as Saifullah, the sword of Allah, and Abu Bakr's words over him have echoed ever since: women will never again give birth to a man like Khalid.

It is easy to read a life like this and feel only awe, to file Khalid away as a soldier and admire him from a safe distance. But his

life puts a harder question to us, and it is not really about war.

The first thing his life asks is whether your trust in Allah can hold when the path makes no earthly sense. When Rafi warned of a hundred waterless miles, Khalid said tawakkalna ala Allah and chose the impossible road, and the water came. He acted, and he relied on Allah, and he did not let fear of the outcome freeze him. Most of us wait for the way to be safe before we move. Khalid moved, trusting that the One who commanded the journey would provide for it. In your own life, the river to cross is rarely a desert; it is the prayer you are afraid to commit to, the wrong you are afraid to leave, the obedience whose cost you cannot yet see paid back. His life asks: will you take the step on trust, before the proof arrives?

The second thing it asks is the harder one, and it is the lesson of the demotion at Damascus. Khalid could not lose a battle, and Allah took the command from him anyway, to protect the hearts of the believers from leaning on a man instead of on their Lord. And Khalid said, we hear and we obey. That is sincerity, ikhlas: to want the cause of Allah to succeed more than you want to be the one who succeeds at it. Ask yourself honestly how much of your striving, your work, your worship, is quietly about being seen as the one who does it. The death of the ego that says how dare they overlook me is worth more to Allah than a hundred victories won with that ego intact. Do one good thing this week and let someone else receive the credit, and watch what it does to your heart.

And the third thing his life asks is where, in truth, you believe your strength comes from. Umar feared the people would say victory comes from Khalid. The Qur'an had already settled it, in

the words David's small band spoke before they ever faced the giant:

How often a small force has defeated a large army with God's permission! God is with those who are steadfast.

QUR'AN 2:249

A hundred times Khalid stood outnumbered, and a hundred times he prevailed, and the lesson the believers were taught was not to trust the sword but the One who unsheathes it. You will feel outnumbered in your own way: by debt, by illness, by sin, by a world that pulls against faith. His life tells you the numbers are not the deciding thing. Steadfastness is, and the help of Allah is, and a small force that holds to Him has beaten armies. So hold your prayer when it is heavy. Hold your trust when the count is against you. Remember Allah until your remembrance becomes a shield, the way Khalid walked among ninety thousand and called them dead men because he was alive with the name of his Lord.

A violent man laid down his sword, learned the supplications, returned a stolen horse, obeyed when he was overlooked, fell in love with the Qur'an in his last months and wept that war had kept him from it for so long, and died marked from head to foot in the path of Allah. May Allah be pleased with Khalid ibn al-Walid, draw out of our hearts whatever ignorance still lingers in them as He drew it out of his, and let our trust rest where his came to rest, on Allah alone, who alone gives the victory.

This chapter follows the account of Khalid ibn al-Walid (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (57:10, 2:249). Where

the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Khalid ibn al-Walid

The Sword of Allah

There is a kind of man the world is certain it has already understood. Khalid ibn al-Walid (may Allah be pleased with him) was such a man. He was born into the highest house of the highest tribe, the son of the richest father in Makkah, raised to know nothing but war and to be the best in the world at it. For years he turned that genius against the believers, and on one terrible afternoon he handed the Muslims the worst day they had yet known. The people of Makkah looked at him and saw a hero. The believers looked at him and saw an enemy. And the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who saw what others could not, looked at the same man and said simply, "Someone like Khalid is too intelligent not to recognise Islam."

He was right. And the day Khalid finally walked into Madinah, the long enemy of God became the Sword of God, and the whole arc of his life turned in a single breath.

A house built on the wrong foundation

To understand Khalid, you have to begin with his father, because the father is the shadow that the son spends his life either following or escaping. Al-Walid ibn al-Mughira was the chief of Banu Makhzum, the proud rival of Banu Hashim, and by every worldly measure he was a giant. He was the wealthiest man in Makkah, said to own every other house on the road from Makkah

to Ta'if. He was among the most eloquent of the Arabs, the eldest of the chiefs, the man whose opinion the others waited to hear before they formed their own.

His generosity was famous, and it was real, but it was generosity for the wrong reasons. He kept houses lit and stocked for the pilgrims. And when Quraysh covered the Kaaba once a year, he carried the entire cost himself every other year, alone, while the rest of the tribe pooled their money for the years in between. They nicknamed him al-Wahid, the One, the man who needed no one. It was a boast dressed up as a kindness.

When the Prophet ﷺ began to recite the Qur'an, al-Walid came and listened, and he was honest enough to be shaken. "I am a poet," he said, "and I know poetry, and this is not poetry. I have never known you to lie. You have none of the marks of a sorcerer." In private he confessed to his people that what he had heard was neither the speech of men nor the speech of jinn. He stood at the very edge of belief.

And there his nephew found him. Abu Jahl, the relentless obstructor of every soul that drew near to the truth, came to his uncle with a wounded look and a poisoned word: people are saying you only go to Muhammad for his food and his money. To a proud, rich man, nothing cuts deeper than the suggestion that he is needy. Al-Walid rose to defend his dignity, and in defending his pride he sold his soul. To prove he was no follower, he agreed to invent a verdict against the message. He paced the room before the chiefs of Quraysh, weighing the words, and settled at last on the lie he could live with: it is sorcery, handed down, that pulls people apart from their families.

Allah revealed the scene back to him, almost moment by moment, in words that have outlived the man and his wealth and

his tribe:

[Prophet], leave Me to deal with the one I created helpless, then gave vast wealth, and sons by his side, making everything easy for him, yet he still hopes I will give him more. No! He has been stubbornly hostile to Our revelation: I will inflict a spiralling torment on him. He planned and plotted, devilishly he plotted! ferociously he plotted! and looked and frowned and scowled and turned away and behaved arrogantly and said, "This is just old sorcery, just the talk of a mortal!" I will throw him into the scorching Fire.

QUR'AN 74:11-26

The man Allah described with such precision did not repent. He grew harder, and more verses came, naming his vices one by one:

do not yield to any contemptible swearer, to any backbiter, slander-monger, or hinderer of good, to anyone who is sinful, aggressive, coarse, and on top of all that, an imposter.

QUR'AN 68:10-13

He died, in the end, of an infected wound from a spear he stepped on by accident, and on his deathbed he spent his final breaths arranging his money and his revenge: collect what I am owed, take back the loans, settle the score against the man who wronged your sister. He was generous to his family to the last. He left them everything but a reason to follow him to anything good.

This was the man whose blood ran in Khalid. And this is the first thing his life teaches: a person is not condemned by the house he is born into. Khalid loved his father, and his father loved him, and yet Khalid would walk out of that whole inheritance of pride and into the service of God.

The young man made of muscle

Khalid was the youngest son of all that wealth, which meant he never had to lift a finger for a living. He could have grown soft. Instead he grew into something singular. They described him as the very image of Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him): towering, broad, built of nothing but muscle, the two of them known as the strongest young men in all of Makkah.

But Khalid's gift was not only his body. He cared for nothing in this world but war, and he turned that obsession into a mastery that left every contemporary behind. Most men, they said, could master one skill and be passable at the rest. Khalid was the best archer, the best with the spear, the finest rider of horses and of camels, the deadliest swordsman, and, rarest of all, the sharpest strategist. He travelled the trade routes and brought back no interest in buying and selling, only the war stories of Persia and Rome, studied and stored away. Everything in him, mind and body alike, pointed at the battlefield.

It is worth pausing on that. The very strength that would one day be a gift to the believers was, for years, a weapon turned against them. The talent was always the same. Only its direction changed. And what changed its direction was not training, for he never needed any. It was guidance. Allah took a man who was the best in the world at the one thing he loved, and pointed him at something worth living for.

The brother who showed him the way out

Khalid's first real brush with the believers came not on a battlefield but in a transaction. He had missed the Battle of Badr, away on a trade route, and returned to find his brother al-Walid

ibn al-Walid a prisoner of the Muslims in Madinah. So Khalid made the dangerous journey north to ransom him.

He arrived to find the prisoners of Badr treated in a way that did not fit anything he expected of war. The Prophet ﷺ had commanded that they be shown excellence: fed from the same food, clothed from the same cloth, never chained too tightly. Those who could not pay a ransom were freed for teaching the Muslims to read. Khalid's brother, son of the richest man in Makkah, carried the highest ransom of all, four thousand dinars. Khalid paid it, took his brother, and left.

They camped that night at Dhul-Hulayfah, the place pilgrims still know as the station where the intention for Umrah is made. In the morning Khalid woke to a letter. His brother was gone, back to Madinah, back to the Prophet ﷺ, a Muslim. He had been moved to belief by the very thing Khalid had just witnessed: the character of these people and of their Prophet ﷺ, unlike anything he had seen in Quraysh. But he had refused to declare his Islam while still a captive, for fear that proud men would sneer that he had only converted to save himself. He wanted to come back as a free man, choosing it for nothing but itself.

That free man now became something more dangerous to Khalid's old life than any army: a brother who loved him and would not stop calling him home. For years the letters passed between them, the Muslim brother and the brother still trying to kill Muslims. One letter carried a message that lodged in Khalid's chest. The Prophet ﷺ had asked after him by name: where is Khalid? And when al-Walid answered that surely Allah would bring him, the Prophet ﷺ said that a man like Khalid could not stay away from Islam forever. Imagine what that did to a man whose own father had spent his dying breath on revenge: to

learn that the leader of the believers, the man he was fighting, harboured no hatred toward him at all, but wanted him, and made room for him.

The slow turning of a stubborn heart

His genius, meanwhile, was doing terrible work. At Uhud, Khalid commanded the Makkan left, his eyes fixed on the hill of the archers. When most of them abandoned their post to gather the spoils, against the Prophet's clear command, Khalid saw the opening in an instant. He wheeled his cavalry around, cut down the few who remained, and struck the believers from behind. It was his strategy, more than anyone's, that turned a Muslim victory into the worst day of grief they had yet known. He rode home to Makkah a hero. And on that same field, his face running with blood, the Prophet ﷺ had prayed for the very people doing this to him: O Allah, forgive my people, for they do not know.

But something was working on Khalid that his victories could not silence. At Hudaibiyyah he watched the Prophet ﷺ slip past him with a feint, the same kind of diversion Khalid himself used to win battles, and he understood that he had been outmanoeuvred by his own art. He watched the Muslims pray the prayer of fear, ranks taking turns to bow and guard, and the thought crossed his mind to strike during it, and somehow the chance never came. Again and again he saw the Prophet ﷺ protected as if by something he could not reach, and slowly the obvious conclusion forced itself on him: this man is divinely guarded. If he were not, I would have reached him.

Then, by his own account, Allah placed something in his heart he could not explain. A sudden love of Islam. A pull he had not chosen and could not argue with. His brother's letters kept coming. He saw the Prophet ﷺ marry his own aunt, Maymunah

bint al-Harith, and watched the believers extend kinship even to their enemies. And he had a dream: he was trapped in a narrow, barren, desolate land, and then he walked out of it into a wide green meadow. He woke certain it was no ordinary dream but a vision. Later Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) would read it for him: the cramped, dead place was the disbelief you were trapped in; the open garden is Islam.

He began, cautiously, to test the idea aloud with the men closest to him. Safwan ibn Umayya swore that if every last person in Quraysh accepted Islam, he would be the one man who never would, for they had killed his father and his brother. His best friend and cousin Ikrimah, the son of Abu Jahl, refused too: follow the man who killed my father? Never. Khalid let them both be, understanding that for them the wound was still too fresh.

But word spread that the great general was wavering, and the elders came for him. Abu Sufyan confronted him, half expecting denial, and got the truth instead: yes, it is so, and what will you do about it? Swords were nearly drawn. And then Ikrimah, who had set the whole confrontation in motion, stepped to Khalid's side and ended it: Khalid has every right to follow what he chooses; if he becomes a Muslim, I will become one with him. That night Khalid made his decision final. He was done with these people. Allah had emptied his heart of them.

The walk into Madinah

He gathered his things and set out by night, and he found he did not want to make the journey alone. On the road he met Uthman ibn Talha, and told him plainly where he was going, and Uthman said he was going to the very same place, for the very same reason. Near the edge of Makkah the two of them met Amr ibn al-As, and he too was bound for Madinah and Islam. Three of the

most formidable men of Quraysh, walking together toward the Prophet ﷺ under no compulsion at all, no defeated army behind them, no pressure forcing their hands. Only the pull Allah had placed in each of their hearts, separately, in secret, until the road brought them together.

It was the first day of Safar, in the eighth year after the Hijrah. When Khalid reached the Prophet ﷺ and offered him the greeting of peace, acknowledging his prophethood, the Prophet's face broke into a great smile. "Quraysh," he said, "has handed us its very heart." Khalid asked the Prophet ﷺ to seek forgiveness for him, for everything he had done, for every soul he had turned away from the path of God. And the Prophet ﷺ told him a thing that should steady the heart of anyone who carries a heavy past: Islam erases all that came before it. Then he prayed, "O Allah, forgive Khalid." Amr ibn al-As and Uthman ibn Talha embraced Islam beside him.

And then, Khalid said, the thing that undid him completely: from that day, the Prophet ﷺ never preferred anyone over him. Not once. As though the man who had struck the believers at Uhud had been a beloved companion all along. The slate was not merely wiped; it was as if it had never been written on.

How he became the Sword of Allah

Khalid knew one thing and wanted to do one thing. He did not settle into the mosque to memorise the Qur'an or sit with the great teachers of the believers. He came to the Prophet ﷺ and asked to be put to work at once: I need no training, I need no delay, send me. He had a new purpose now, and the same fierce energy he had once spent against the believers he poured into their cause.

His chance came in less than two weeks, at the Battle of Mu'tah. The Prophet ﷺ sent three thousand believers to the frontier of the Roman Empire, and Khalid went among them not as a commander but as a foot soldier, content to be the new man, content to serve. The Prophet ﷺ named the order of command: Zayd ibn Haritha first, then Ja'far, then Abdullah ibn Rawaha, and if all three should fall, the believers were to choose a leader from among themselves. In Madinah, the Prophet ﷺ stood and watched the distant battle unfold through revelation, and his voice broke as he reported it: Zayd has been killed. Ja'far has taken the banner; Ja'far has been killed. Abdullah ibn Rawaha has taken it; Abdullah has fallen. Three of the most beloved to him, gone in an afternoon, against an enemy that outnumbered the believers many times over.

On the field, the banner went searching for a hand to hold it. Thabit ibn al-Arqam, one of the elders of the Ansar, took it up and turned to Khalid: take it, Abu Sulayman. And Khalid, who feared no enemy on earth, hesitated, not out of fear but out of humility. No, he said, you have the greater right. You are one of the people of Badr; you have years in Islam that I do not. Thabit pressed it on him and asked the gathered believers whether they were agreed upon Khalid, and they answered, with one voice, yes.

So he took the banner, and then Khalid went to work. With three thousand exhausted men against an empire, he reshaped the entire force overnight, shifting his units so that the Romans believed they faced an army ten or fifteen times its true size, with fresh reinforcements arriving from every side. He cut a path straight through the Byzantine lines. They counted, afterward, that he broke nine swords in his hand that day and drew his tenth. And when there was no more to be gained but lives, he gathered the believers and brought them home, an outnumbered force

extracted nearly whole from the jaws of the greatest power on earth.

In Madinah, watching, the Prophet ﷺ spoke the words that would name Khalid for all of history: "Khalid has taken the banner, and he is a sword among the swords of Allah." Sayfullah al-Maslul, the drawn sword of God. The enemy of the believers had become their shield.

What Khalid's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read Khalid's story as a tale of talent, the natural-born general who simply changed sides. That reading misses the heart of it entirely. Khalid's genius never changed. What changed was who he served, and that change came from Allah, and it asks something of every one of us.

The first thing his life asks is whether you believe your past can be erased. Khalid arrived at the Prophet ﷺ carrying years of war against God's messenger, the blood of believers, the memory of Uhud. He asked for forgiveness, and the answer was that Islam wipes out all that came before, and the proof was that he was loved instantly, as though none of it had happened. Many of us are quietly certain that we have disqualified ourselves, that some old sin or season of our life has placed us permanently behind. Khalid's life says no. Turn to Allah and the slate is not just cleaned, it is as if it was never marked. Do not let the weight of what you were keep you from becoming what He is calling you to be.

The second thing it asks is humility in the face of God's gifts. The most striking moment at Mu'tah is not Khalid breaking nine swords. It is Khalid, the deadliest soldier alive, refusing the banner because others had more years in faith than he did. He

knew exactly what he was capable of, and still he would not push ahead of people Allah had honoured before him. Whatever Allah has given you, your intelligence, your strength, your skill, it is easy to let it become a reason for pride. Khalid took the very thing that could have made him arrogant and made it a means of service instead. Ask what gift of yours has quietly become about you, and how it might instead be laid, like a banner you did not grab for, at the service of God.

And the third thing his life asks is the hardest. Khalid never had time to memorise the Qur'an; he spent his few remaining years leading more than fifty campaigns. But he went to Salim, one of the great reciters, and made a request that must have cost him everything. Recite to me the verses about my father, he said, so that I can repeat them. The verses about al-Walid are not gentle. They end with the fire. Khalid made himself say them, in a trembling voice, because his sincerity to Allah would not let him keep even his father's memory ahead of the truth. That is ikhlas: when love of Allah outweighs the deepest pull of blood and pride, and you choose what is true even when it breaks your heart to say it. Most of us have some corner of our life we have walled off from God, some loyalty or comfort or grievance we will not surrender. Khalid surrendered the one nearest the bone.

So take something small from him into an ordinary life. Stop believing your past has shut the door; turn back and let Allah erase it. Take the gift you are proudest of and quietly put it to work for Him, without grabbing for the place of honour. And find the one thing you have kept back from God, and give Him that too. That is how an enemy became a sword in the hand of his Lord. May Allah be pleased with Khalid ibn al-Walid, the Sword of Allah, accept his sacrifices, and grant us the sincerity to turn our whole selves, gifts and griefs and all, toward Him alone.

This chapter follows the account of Khalid ibn al-Walid (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (74:11-26, 68:10-13). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abu Saeed al-Khudri

The Jewel of Madinah

There is a strange gap in the way this companion is remembered. His name appears in the books of hadith more than almost any other, recited in classrooms and quoted from minbars around the world, and yet his own story is one of the least known of all the Sahaba. You can read an entire volume of companion biographies and find him given a paragraph, sometimes only a line, even though more than a thousand of the Prophet's sayings reach us through his heart and his mouth.

His name was Sa'd ibn Malik, known to all as Abu Saeed al-Khudri (may Allah be pleased with him), the great scholar and jurist of Madinah. To understand him, you have to begin not with his learning but with a boy of ten standing beside his parents in a new city, waiting to take the hand of a man who had just arrived among them.

A child of the city of light

He was born into the tribe of Khazraj, one of the two great clans of the Ansar, in the city that would become Madinah. He was Madani through and through. He was there before the Prophet ﷺ arrived, he lived his whole life in that city, and he would one day die in it and be buried in its sacred ground. While other companions rode out to the far edges of the new empire, Abu

Saeed stayed close to the place where the message had taken root, like a tree that will not be moved from the soil it loves.

He said of himself, simply, that he was ten years old when the Prophet ﷺ made his hijrah to Madinah. His mother and father were both among the Ansar who accepted Islam, and they brought their young son with them to pledge himself to the Messenger of Allah. His mother was among those women who gave her own pledge directly, not through her husband but with her own hand placed in trust. Picture the scene: a ten year old boy, brought by parents who had already given their hearts, learning before he was even grown what it means to belong to something larger than yourself.

His was a household woven through with faith. His mother had been married before, and from that first marriage came righteous half siblings who also became companions of the Prophet ﷺ. His older sister, Furay'ah bint Malik, would later stand at the center of a verse of the Qur'an. Her husband died while away from Madinah, and the ruling for a widow's waiting period was revealed in connection with her:

If any of you die and leave widows, the widows should wait for four months and ten nights before remarrying. When they have completed this set time, you will not be blamed for anything they may reasonably choose to do with themselves. God is fully aware of what you do.

QUR'AN 2:234

This was the family that shaped him. Faith was not a thing he chose late and alone. It was the air of his home.

The boy turned away at Uhud

When the Battle of Badr came, Abu Saeed was a child of about eleven, far too young to have any part in it. But by the time of Uhud, two years later, he was thirteen, and thirteen was close enough to hope.

Before Uhud, the Prophet ﷺ needed men, and the love of the Ansar for him took a remarkable shape. Parents began bringing their teenage sons to present them as fighters, eager to give their own children to the cause. Think about what that means. A vast army was marching on Madinah to take revenge for Badr, and the people of the city were not hiding their boys away. They were leading them forward by the hand and offering them. The Prophet ﷺ had to turn many of them back. He is too young, he is too young. Not every fourteen year old was allowed, not every sixteen year old. Some were sent home.

Abu Saeed was one of them. His father took his hand and brought him before the Prophet ﷺ, holding up the boy's arms to show that he was ready to fight. The Prophet ﷺ looked at him, up and down, and said, turn him back. He is not old enough. And his father took him home.

That moment carries a quiet weight, because it was the last time Abu Saeed would walk beside his father. The boy and a group of other youths, all turned away, waited at a distance from the battlefield to hear the news. Their fathers, their uncles, their brothers, the capable men of their families, had all gone forward with the Prophet ﷺ. The children could only wait, the way children have always waited, for word of whether the people they loved were alive.

The blood that mixed with the Prophet's blood

What happened on the field reached him afterward, from the mouths of those who had been there. His father, Malik, was among the men who did not flee when the battle turned against the Muslims. When the Prophet ﷺ was struck again and again, struck even in his face until his teeth were broken and blood ran from his blessed mouth, the Ansar who loved him more than themselves pressed in around him to shield his body.

Abu Saeed's father was one of them. As the blood of the Prophet ﷺ fell, he caught it, instinctively, unwilling to let it touch the ground and unwilling to wipe it away. So he put it to his mouth. It was not a calculated act. It was the reflex of a man trying to protect the most precious person in the world to him in the only way left to him. And then he was struck down, and killed.

The Prophet ﷺ was deeply wounded by the deaths of these men. Almost all who fell at Uhud were Ansar, the people who had taken him in and then died defending him, and it broke his heart. Looking at Malik on the field, he said, whoever wishes to look at a man whose blood has mixed with my blood, let him look at this man. A father's last act of love had been answered, in the same breath, by the love of the Prophet ﷺ himself.

Then the Messenger of Allah rode toward the waiting children, the ones about to become orphans. He looked at the boy and asked, are you Sa'd? The child answered, may my father and mother be ransom for you, Messenger of Allah, yes. Abu Saeed leaned up and kissed the knee of the Prophet ﷺ on his horse, offering himself the way his parents had taught him. And the Prophet ﷺ came down from his mount and told the thirteen year old, gently and directly, that his father had been killed as a martyr, and that Allah would magnify his reward on his father's account.

The boy who would not ask

What came after the grief was hunger. Many of the houses of the Ansar had given everything, and Abu Saeed, now the only one left to care for his widowed mother, sank into poverty. So his mother sent him to ask the Prophet ﷺ for help.

He came near and overheard the Prophet ﷺ speaking to the Ansar, and the Prophet ﷺ was saying that whatever good he had, any wealth, any animals, any food, he would never store it away from them. Then he said something that lodged in the boy's heart. Whoever seeks dignity, Allah will dignify him. Whoever seeks to be self sufficient, Allah will make him sufficient. And no one is given any gift better or more expansive than patience.

The boy had come to ask. But when he heard those words, he could not. He turned the request over and decided he would not ask the Prophet ﷺ for anything. Instead, he said, I will seek it from Allah. He went home, told his mother what he had heard, and they turned to their Lord. And he would later say that Allah opened the doors of provision upon their household, blessed their produce, multiplied their crops, until he did not know of a single house of the Ansar that became wealthier than theirs. A boy who had nothing chose to ask Allah rather than people, and Allah answered in a way the boy could never have arranged for himself.

This is one of the keys to his whole life. The same understanding that turned a grieving teenager away from begging would later make him a man whom rulers could not frighten.

The student who became the teacher of the world

As he grew, Abu Saeed fought alongside the Prophet ﷺ in every battle that followed Uhud, and he was among the people of

Ridwan, those who gave their pledge under the tree, the pledge of which Allah declared Himself pleased. But his lasting gift to the ummah was not the sword. It was his memory.

He was one of those rare companions who could describe the Prophet ﷺ from every side. He spoke of his modesty, saying that the Prophet ﷺ was more shy than a virgin in her private chamber, and that when something displeased him, they would see it in his face. He narrated as a guest, having visited the Prophet ﷺ in his home and seen him pray in a single worn garment, a glimpse of the deep poverty of the man who led them. And he narrated as a host, for the Prophet ﷺ visited him when he was sick and ate a small piece of lamb at his bedside. Imagine the Messenger of Allah, with all that pressed upon him, finding time to visit an unwell teenager.

The Prophet ﷺ taught him directly, face to face. He told Abu Saeed that whoever is pleased with Allah as his Lord, with Islam as his religion, and with Muhammad ﷺ as his Prophet, has been guaranteed Paradise. Abu Saeed, hardly believing it could be so simple, asked him to repeat it, and the Prophet ﷺ said it again, then added that there is a deed that raises a person's rank in Paradise by a hundred grades, each grade as far apart as the heaven and the earth, and that deed is striving in the path of Allah.

Through Abu Saeed, more than a thousand sayings of the Prophet ﷺ have come down to us, and you have almost certainly lived inside his narrations without knowing it. When you are told that whoever fasts a single day for the sake of Allah, Allah places between him and the Fire a distance of seventy years, that reaches you through Abu Saeed. So does the saying that no journey should be undertaken to any mosque except three. And

so does this, which touches every worshipper who has ever stood in the Prophet's city: that what lies between his house and his pulpit is one of the gardens of Paradise. Every time someone prays in that blessed place, every time these sayings shape a Muslim's worship, Abu Saeed is the vessel through which the words traveled.

When the Prophet ﷺ passed away, Abu Saeed was twenty three. He took his place teaching in the Prophet's mosque, and students came from across the world to sit at his feet. He taught the Qur'an five verses at a time, giving the context and the meaning, then returning later to teach five more, a careful method made for understanding, not for speed. When the seekers of hadith arrived, he would spread out his cloak for them and say, welcome to those whom the Messenger of Allah ﷺ instructed us to care for, welcome to the inheritors of the Prophet ﷺ. And he urged them, spread the hadith, for that is how it stays alive in the world.

Yet for all his closeness to the Prophet ﷺ, he carried a humility that bordered on grief. When a man once said to him, how blessed you are to have seen the Messenger of Allah and kept his company, Abu Saeed would weep and answer, my brother, you do not know what we did after him. He measured himself against the standard of the one he had loved, and never felt he had lived up to it.

Truth in a frightened age, and a cave at the end

He lived a long time, long enough to see the ummah split and bleed. And here you can watch him live the very hadith he transmitted. He narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said no one should let the fear of people stop him from speaking the truth when he knows it. So Abu Saeed spoke. He advised rulers, he confronted those who oppressed, he traveled once to give a governor a full

measure of counsel and then returned to Madinah. Yet he also wept over the times his courage had fallen short, saying there were things he wished he had spoken about more forcefully. He held the truth and the unity of the community in the same two hands, refusing to let the ummah tear itself apart through him.

It was from him that we have the saying that became a compass for every believer after him: whoever sees something evil, let him change it with his hand; if he cannot, then with his tongue; and if he cannot, then let him hate it in his heart, and that is the weakest of faith. He once stood in that very situation, when a ruler moved the sermon before the Eid prayer against the Sunnah, and supported the man who rose to object.

Near the end of his long life, in the year sixty three after the hijrah, Madinah came under a brutal attack, and companions of the Prophet ﷺ were killed. Abu Saeed, who knew the land better than anyone, was chased into a cave. A man pursued him, a soldier who had come from far away and been led somehow into the killing of fellow Muslims. Abu Saeed held his sword and warned him not to enter. The man said either you come out or I come in. Abu Saeed answered that he would not come out, and that if the man entered, he would defend himself. The soldier came in anyway. And Abu Saeed lowered his weapon and recited the words of the Qur'an spoken by the better of the two sons of Adam:

If you raise your hand to kill me, I will not raise mine to kill you. I fear God, the Lord of all worlds, and I would rather you were burdened with my sins as well as yours and became an inhabitant of the Fire: such is the evildoers' reward.

QUR'AN 5:28-29

The man looked at this old companion of the Prophet ﷺ and asked him, are you truly his companion? Abu Saeed said yes. The man asked him to pray for his forgiveness, and Abu Saeed asked Allah to forgive him, and the soldier turned and left him alive. His house, though, was raided and stripped, until even the wool stuffing of his pillows was carried off.

A grave he chose with his own hand

Abu Saeed died about a year later, in his eighties, on a Friday in the month of Muharram. His death was as deliberate and faithful as his life. He had narrated many of the Prophet's teachings on how to meet death and care for the dying, including the instruction to prompt a dying person to say there is no god but Allah. So as he lay dying, it was his own two sons, repeating to him what he had taught them from the Prophet ﷺ, who guided their father through his final breaths. He had also narrated that when a righteous soul is carried on its bier, it cries out, take me forward, take me forward, longing for what awaits it, and that every creature hears this except the human being. He prayed to the very end, when his body could no longer stand, using only the gestures of his limbs and the remembrance of Allah on his tongue.

Before he died, he took his son by the hand and walked with him to a precise spot at the far edge of al-Baqi, the cemetery where the Sahaba lie, and said, bury me here. He chose it himself, near the resting place of one of the great companions for whom the Throne of Allah is said to have shaken. He chose even the cloth he would be buried in. When the jurist of Madinah passed, the people came from near and far, the few companions still living, the students who had gathered his narrations, and they prayed over him. He left behind two sons who carried his learning

forward for long lives of their own, so that the river of hadith he had received from the Prophet ﷺ kept flowing through Madinah long after he was laid in the ground he had chosen.

What Abu Saeed's life asks of our faith

It is easy to be impressed by a man who memorized a thousand sayings and taught the world. It is harder, and far more useful, to let his life put a question to our own faith.

Start with the boy who would not ask. He was hungry, fatherless, and sent specifically to request help from the one person most likely to give it. And when he heard the Prophet ﷺ say that whoever seeks sufficiency from Allah will be made sufficient, he turned his need away from the creation and toward the Creator. This is the quality to take from him first: to lift your wants to Allah before you carry them to people. Most of us reach instinctively for human hands, for the favor, the connection, the safety net we can see. Abu Saeed teaches a deeper trust, that the One who can open the doors of provision is closer than any patron, and that asking Him is never begging. Try it in something small this week. A worry, a need, a door you want opened. Take it to Allah first, fully, before you take it anywhere else, and watch what that does to your heart even before it does anything to your circumstances.

Then look at what he did with a single overheard sentence. He heard the Prophet ﷺ say that no gift is better than patience, and he built a life on it. He did not merely admire the words. He acted on them, immediately, and they reshaped his household. How many beautiful things have we heard, in lectures and verses and reminders, that changed nothing because we never moved on them? Faith is not the collection of good sayings. It is the willingness to let one of them rearrange your life.

And consider the cave. An old man, cornered, armed, with every worldly right to defend his own life, chose instead the words of the son of Adam who would not raise his hand. He feared Allah more than he feared death, and he would rather be wronged than be a wrongdoer. That is the fruit of a lifetime of taking Allah seriously: when the final test came, his fear of Allah was simply stronger than his fear of dying. We will not all face a sword. But every day asks a smaller version of the same question, whether our fear of Allah outweighs our fear of loss, embarrassment, or the displeasure of people. Abu Saeed wept that he had not spoken the truth forcefully enough, even though he spoke it more bravely than most. Let that honest regret be a mercy to us: speak the true word you have been swallowing, change with your hand what you can, and if you cannot, at least refuse to make peace with the wrong in your heart.

His whole life, in the end, was a vessel. He received the words of the Prophet ﷺ with care, guarded them, and passed them on, asking nothing for himself. Most of us will never narrate a hadith. But every one of us carries something of this religion that someone is waiting to receive, a child, a friend, a stranger who sees how we pray. Be a faithful vessel. Hold what you have been given honestly, live it before you speak it, and hand it on.

May Allah be pleased with Abu Saeed al-Khudri, the jewel of Madinah who asked from his Lord and not from people, who acted on what he heard, and who feared Allah more than the sword. May Allah grant us his trust, his courage, and his humility, and gather us with him and with the Prophet ﷺ in the gardens he spent his life describing.

This chapter follows the account of Abu Saeed al-Khudri (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an

*translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2:234, 5:28-29).
Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most
widely reported has been followed.*

Rabiah ibn Kab al-Aslami

The Companion Who Asked for Paradise

There is a kind of love that arrives slowly, built over years of shared meals and tested loyalty. And there is another kind that strikes all at once, in the space of a single glance, and rearranges a whole life around it. The story of Rabiah ibn Kab (may Allah be pleased with him) is the story of the second kind. He was a young man, barely past childhood, standing on the edge of a city as a stranger entered it. He looked once, and from that moment he wanted nothing the world could offer except to be near him, in this life and in the next.

He is one of the quieter names among the companions, with only a handful of narrations to his name, no governorship, no famous battlefield speech. But the one thing his life turned on is among the most beautiful requests a human being ever made of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and it remains open to every one of us.

A stranger on the road to Madinah

To understand Rabiah, you have to go back to the Hijra itself, to the road between Makkah and Madinah. Among those who accepted Islam along that road was a chief named Buraydah, who came with seventy of his followers. When the Prophet ﷺ asked his tribe, the man answered that he was from Aslam, and the Prophet ﷺ took it as a good omen, turning to Abu Bakr and remarking that they were now safe. Rabiah came from that same

tribe, Banu Aslam, from the outskirts of Madinah. We do not know the exact hour he entered Islam, but we know where his heart was set. As the Prophet ﷺ settled into the city, this teenager came in from its edges to see, with his own eyes, the man everyone was speaking of.

What happened next he would one day describe to his own son, and the words have a rare poetry to them. He said he was a young man who had just reached adulthood when Allah opened his heart to the light of faith and filled his mind with the understanding of Islam. And the very first time he laid eyes on the Prophet ﷺ, he loved him with a love that took hold of his entire being. Not only his heart, he insisted; every part of him became immersed in the love of this man he knew almost nothing about. He had simply looked, and he had fallen. And from that look came a single, consuming aim: to find a way to get close to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

Sleeping at the door

The problem was that he was nobody. He was not from the great tribes of the Ansar competing to host the Prophet ﷺ, nor one of the Muhajirun whose long road of sacrifice had bound them to him. He was a poor, unmarried young man from outside the city, with no obvious way to slip into the small circle around the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

His answer was to join the young men who had no homes and slept in the back of the mosque, the people later remembered as the people of the Suffah. He went and slept there, among the poorest of the Muslims, and noticed something. Whenever the Prophet ﷺ received a gift of food, he would carry it out of his house, sit down with these homeless young men, and share it

with them. The ones you would expect to be most forgotten were already being fed by the hand of the Prophet ﷺ himself.

So Rabiah began to draw closer, and then he made a decision about his whole purpose for being there. He had not come to Madinah for food or shelter, which he could have had back among his own people, but for one reason only: to serve the Prophet ﷺ, to be near him. So he resolved to present himself directly, reasoning that if the Messenger of Allah ﷺ accepted him, he would find joy in his nearness and be blessed with the good of this life and the next.

So one day, after a prayer, he approached him and said, in effect, "My name is Rabiah. I would like to offer myself to your service. Anything you need, Messenger of Allah, I want to be there for you." He braced himself for a gentle refusal. But, as Rabiah put it, the Prophet ﷺ did not disappoint him. He accepted him.

From that day, Rabiah lived in his shadow. He moved in the orbit of the Prophet ﷺ, always within his glance, waiting for any small request. The Prophet ﷺ, being who he was, did most things for himself and busied himself serving others, so the requests were few. But Rabiah stayed. If the Prophet ﷺ so much as looked in his direction, he would rise, anticipating a need. He stayed through the whole day and into the night, until the very last prayer of the evening.

And then, when it was pitch black, he would think about returning to sleep under the shelter of the mosque. But a thought would stop him: perhaps tonight the Prophet ﷺ would need something. So he would fetch water, set it at the door, and sit on the doorstep to wait. Picture that boy putting his head down outside the home of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, night after night, close enough to hear his voice. The Prophet ﷺ would recite for long

stretches, and Rabbiah would doze and wake to the sound of it, his eyes finally getting the better of him before dawn.

"Ask me"

Now the Prophet ﷺ had a habit: he could not bear for someone to do a kindness for him without answering it with something greater. And here was this young man, fetching his water, sitting at his door, asking nothing in return. So one day he surprised him. Rabbiah jumped up, ready for an instruction, but the words were not what he expected. "Ask me," the Prophet ﷺ said. Ask him for what? He was the one there to serve. But the Prophet ﷺ meant it: ask for anything, and I will give it to you. A poor boy with no wife, no wealth, no home, being told by the Messenger of Allah ﷺ to name any wish. He had the presence of mind not to blurt out an answer. "Give me some time to think about it," he said. And the Prophet ﷺ agreed.

So Rabbiah went back to the mosque and turned it over. He could ask for something of this world: a way out of poverty, a wife, children, all natural for a young man. But then he caught himself. This world was temporary, he told himself, and whatever sustenance Allah had written for him would reach him in any case. The Prophet ﷺ, on the other hand, had a station with his Lord, and whatever he asked of Allah would not be refused. So why spend such a request on something that would fade?

He made his choice. He went to the Prophet ﷺ, who was no doubt expecting to hear about money or marriage, and said the words that would define his life: "I ask you for your companionship in Paradise." The Prophet ﷺ was taken aback. It was a strikingly mature answer for so young a man, and he asked whether someone had told him to say it. Rabbiah swore that no one had; he had reasoned his own way to it.

The Prophet ﷺ fell silent for a long while. Then he gave an answer that turns the whole story from a single wish into a lifelong instruction. "I will do that," he said. And then: "So help me to help you, by increasing your prostrations."

Help me help you. What you are asking is not small or easy, and many want the companionship of the Prophet ﷺ. So work for it. Increasing the prostrations meant increasing the prayer, the voluntary prayer in the depth of the night, the greatest practice of the Prophet ﷺ himself, who beneath his role as Messenger was the most devoted worshipper ever to walk the earth. He did not toss out the promise and walk away; he gave the boy something to do for it. And Rabiah took it to heart, throwing himself into worship so that the closeness of this world would carry into the next.

A wedding arranged from nothing

There is a tender sequel to this, because the Prophet ﷺ had not forgotten that the young man was, after all, young. Sometime later he asked him, in effect, "Don't you want to get married?" But Rabiah, his heart full of the answer he had already given, said he did not want anything to take him from serving the Prophet ﷺ. He asked again, and Rabiah admitted he had nothing to offer as a dowry anyway. The Prophet ﷺ knew what was good for him better than he knew it himself, Rabiah told himself; if he asked a third time, he would say yes. The third time came, and Rabiah answered, "Who would marry me, when I have nothing to give? All I do here is live among the homeless, fetch water, and follow you."

Now the Prophet ﷺ took charge entirely, doing something he rarely did, giving a direct command rather than a gentle proposal. He named a particular family of standing and told Rabiah to tell

them the Prophet ﷺ was commanding them to marry their daughter to him. Imagine it: a penniless young man known for sleeping in the mosque, knocking on the door of a noble family with such a message. They were astonished, and asked him to confirm the name. But their answer was full of faith. They welcomed the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and the one he had sent, said they trusted he knew what was best for them, and gave their daughter in marriage on the spot.

But the difficulties were only beginning, and at every step the Prophet ﷺ stayed engaged. How could Rabiah give a dowry when he owned nothing? The Prophet ﷺ called on Buraydah, that chief from the road of the Hijra, and told his clan to gather a measure of gold for the bride. The wedding feast he also could not afford; again the Prophet ﷺ turned to Buraydah's people for an animal to slaughter. And then, most touching of all, he sent Rabiah to his own household to ask his wife what barley she had stored. She brought out perhaps seven measures and said it was all they had. The cupboard of the Prophet ﷺ was emptied so this poor young man could have a wedding. They cooked the animal, the bride's family prepared the barley, and suddenly there was bread and meat. The Prophet ﷺ gathered his companions and came, and they ate together. Afterward he gave Rabiah a piece of land beside Abu Bakr's, so that the young man promised the nearness of the Prophet ﷺ in Paradise now lived as a neighbour to his closest friend on earth.

One palm tree, and the fear of Allah

Now that he had a home, a wife, and property, Rabiah felt something shift in himself that worried him. Used to living entirely in the service of the Prophet ﷺ, he now felt himself growing

attached to the world. This unease is the setting for the only other notable incident in his life records.

He fell into a dispute with Abu Bakr over a single palm tree that stood near the line between their properties. In the heat of the argument, Abu Bakr said a word that hurt Rabiah's feelings. Rabiah does not even tell us what the word was. What he tells us is what happened next, and it reveals two of the greatest souls of this religion at once. The moment Abu Bakr realized he had wounded him, he said, "Say that same word back to me, so that we are equal. I do not want to meet Allah on the Day of Judgment having said a word that hurt you." Rabiah refused; there was no possibility of his returning a hurtful word to Abu Bakr. But Abu Bakr pressed him again and again, because his fear was real: he had hurt his brother and could not bear to carry that to his Lord. Finally he said he would go to the Prophet ﷺ himself and have him order Rabiah to say the word back.

So Abu Bakr set off toward the Prophet ﷺ, and here Rabiah's fear took a different shape. His own tribe heard he had quarrelled with Abu Bakr and came ready to take his side, telling him he should be the one demanding the apology. Rabiah turned on them. Did they not understand who this man was? This was Abu Bakr, the second of the two in the cave whom the Quran itself mentions, the foremost of the Muslims. Of that companion in the cave, Allah revealed:

Even if you do not help the Prophet, God helped him when the disbelievers drove him out: when the two of them were in the cave, he said to his companion, 'Do not worry, God is with us,' and God sent His calm down to him, aided him with forces invisible to you, and brought down the disbelievers' plan. God's plan is higher: God is almighty and wise.

Rabiah told his people to leave him alone and go quickly, before Abu Bakr turned and saw them gathered, and thought Rabiah was rallying a faction against him, and the Prophet ﷺ became upset, and Allah became displeased, and Rabiah was ruined. Notice the chain of his fear. It did not stop at his neighbour, or even at the Prophet ﷺ; it ran all the way up to Allah. He sent his own tribe away rather than let a dispute over a palm tree drag him toward his Lord's displeasure.

When he caught up to the Prophet ﷺ, who asked what had happened, Rabiah told the truth. The Prophet ﷺ told him he had done well. He was not to throw the word back; instead he was to say, "May Allah forgive you, O Abu Bakr."

So Rabiah said it. And at those words, Abu Bakr broke down, took hold of his beard and wept, repeating, "May Allah forgive you," and walked home in tears that could be heard, a man near the very top of this ummah terrified over a single word that had slipped in a heated argument.

The long silence

After this, the narrations about Rabiah grow quiet, because his whole life was quiet, lived in the shadow of one man whom he accompanied until the end. But when the Prophet ﷺ died, something in him went silent. Many companions outlived him and became great teachers, narrating hundreds of traditions. Rabiah did not. He went back to his people and lived quietly, leaving behind only a handful of narrations passed to his son Nu'aym. The death of the Prophet ﷺ fell hard on a young man whose entire being had been reorganized around proximity to him. He

fell into his sorrow and simply waited for the day he would be reunited with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

That reunion came in a way both terrible and fitting. Rabbiah lived until the catastrophe that struck Madinah years later, the massacre of al-Harrah, when hundreds of the Muhajirun and Ansar were killed in the city of the Prophet ﷺ. Rabbiah was among the slain that day. He died a martyr, and so the young man who had asked for nothing in this world but the companionship of the Prophet ﷺ in the next went on to meet him. He had slept at his door, walked in his orbit, and asked, of all the things he could have asked, only to be with him in Paradise. And he left the world on his way there.

What Rabbiah's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read this story and feel only admiration for a devoted young man, then close the book unchanged. But Rabbiah's life is not a keepsake; it is a question aimed at our own iman, and the question is sharp because his situation was so much like ours. He had no wealth, no rank, no claim on greatness, just an ordinary person who made one extraordinary choice about where to point his heart.

The first thing his life asks is what we truly want. When the door of "ask me for anything" swung open, the world rushed in: money, a wife, a way out of poverty, all of it legitimate and tempting. Rabbiah weighed it and chose differently, and his reasoning is available to every one of us. This world is temporary; the provision Allah has written for you will reach you regardless of how hard you grasp at it. So why spend your one great request on something that fades? He chose the lasting over the passing, not because the passing was forbidden, but because he saw clearly that it was small. That clarity is faith. We all know, in

theory, that the Hereafter outweighs this world; Rabiah let that knowledge govern his choice. Ask yourself what you would have asked at that door, and you will learn where your heart truly sits.

The second thing his life asks is whether we are willing to work for what we say we want. The Prophet ﷺ did not simply grant the wish and send him off. He said, "Help me to help you, by increasing your prostrations." Paradise was promised, and still it had to be pursued, prayer by prayer, in the dark of the night when no one was watching. This is the part that turns longing into religion. It is not enough to love the Prophet ﷺ in feeling; the love is proved in the sujood. So make this concrete today. Add prayers that no one will see, and ask Allah in them for nearness to His Messenger ﷺ in Paradise. That request is still open: the same door the Prophet ﷺ opened for Rabiah, Allah keeps open for anyone willing to do the quiet work.

The third thing his life asks is whether our fear of Allah reaches into the smallest corners of our conduct, the way it reached into a quarrel over a single palm tree. Both men trembled over one hurtful word, each more afraid of meeting Allah with it on his record than of losing the argument. We tend to reserve our fear of Allah for the large sins and excuse the small cruelties of the tongue, telling ourselves the other person had it coming. The way to imitate them is immediate: the next time you wound someone, even when you feel justified, be the first to say, "May Allah forgive you," and let it end there for the sake of Allah rather than your pride.

And there is a quiet mercy threaded through all of it that should steady the heart of anyone who feels small. Rabiah was not a scholar, a commander, or a famous name, and he narrated almost nothing. Yet he was promised the companionship of the

Messenger of Allah ﷺ in Paradise, and he died on the road to it. What he gave was not greatness; it was love directed rightly, sincerity in service, and one request made for the everlasting life rather than the passing one, all within the reach of every ordinary believer. You do not need to be remembered by people; you need to be near to Allah and His Messenger ﷺ, and the way is the same as it was for a poor boy at a doorstep: want it truly, work for it quietly, and trust the promise of the One who does not refuse His Prophet ﷺ.

So take one thing from Rabiah into your own ordinary life. Choose the lasting over the passing in one decision today. Pray two units no one will see, and ask in them for the company of the Prophet ﷺ. Swallow one hurtful word and offer forgiveness instead.

May Allah be pleased with Rabiah ibn Kab al-Aslami, who asked for the best of all gifts and worked for it in the dark. May Allah place the love of His Messenger ﷺ in our hearts as it was in his, and gather us with the Prophet ﷺ in the Paradise toward which Rabiah set his whole life.

This chapter follows the account of Rabiah ibn Kab al-Aslami (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (9:40). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Saeed ibn Amir

The Governor Who Wept

There is a kind of person Islam produces that the world has no category for: a man who once stood in a crowd watching another man die, did nothing to stop it, carried that guilt for the rest of his life, and let it turn him into one of the finest human beings of his generation. Saeed ibn Amir (may Allah be pleased with him) was that man. He governed a great city for the leader of the believers, and the only complaints anyone could find against him were the marks of his own holiness. And every so often, in the middle of a gathering, he would simply collapse, because a memory had reached him that he could not carry.

To understand him, you have to understand what he was before, and what he saw with his own eyes.

The family he came from

Saeed was a young man of Makkah, born into one of its powerful houses, the kind of family that led the military campaigns of Quraysh and sat among its nobles. They were wealthy, proud, established people. His sister Fatima embraced Islam. So did his brother Jameel, who would one day be the great-grandfather of one of the greatest scholars of hadith in the history of this religion. The light of Islam moved quietly through that bloodline.

But the family also carried a grudge against the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that ran very deep. His uncle was Uqbah ibn Abi

Mu'ayt, one of the most vicious enemies the Prophet ﷺ ever had. This was the man who, while the Prophet ﷺ was prostrating near the Kaaba, dumped the filth and entrails of a slaughtered camel onto his back as he lay in sujud, while the crowd laughed, until little Fatima came running to scrape the filth off her father and wipe her tears. Uqbah was killed at Badr, still an enemy. He is, by the understanding of the scholars, the very man the Qur'an describes biting his own hands in regret on the Day of Judgment:

On that Day the evildoer will bite his own hand and say, "If only I had taken the same path as the Messenger. Woe is me! If only I had not taken so and so as a friend-

QUR'AN 25:27-28

That was Saeed's uncle, and his wider tribe was full of people who led the charge against Islam. So Saeed grew up surrounded by hatred for the Prophet ﷺ, though he himself was a younger man who had not fought at Badr or carried a personal vendetta. He was, more than anything, a witness to the cruelty of his own people.

The day at Tan'im

Saeed told the story of his Islam from a single day. Not a sermon he heard, not a verse that softened him. A killing he watched.

The Muslims had sent out teachers, and one of them was a man named Khubayb ibn Adi (may Allah be pleased with him). Khubayb was captured and dragged to a place called Tan'im, just outside Makkah, to be crucified. The mobs poured out to see it, and Saeed went with them. He was young, on the wrong side, one of the polytheists in the crowd. He admitted later that he may

have carried some of the wood, though he did not strike the killing blow. He was simply there, among his people, watching.

And he could not stop watching. He saw them string Khubayb up, and the blood run from him as they cut at his body, piece by piece. He heard them taunt the dying man: would he be pleased, they jeered, if Muhammad ﷺ were in his place and he were safe at home? And Saeed heard Khubayb answer, with the calm of a man already half in the next world, that by Allah he would not wish the Prophet ﷺ to be pricked by even a single thorn while he sat safe with his wife and children. He watched Khubayb ask for two units of prayer and pray them with perfect composure, saying that if he had not feared they would think him afraid, he would have prayed longer. And then Saeed heard Khubayb call upon Allah against the people killing him, and saw the crowd, even mighty Abu Sufyan, throw themselves to the ground at the force of that dying man's prayer.

Saeed went home that night, and he could not sleep. He kept replaying it: the conviction in Khubayb's face, the strength that nothing they did could shake, the prayer that had landed on him too, because he had been there, he had stood in that mob. The faith of the man being murdered was simply on a different order than anything in the world Saeed knew.

Something broke open in him. He went out to the assembly of Quraysh and called out to them: I want nothing to do with you, nothing to do with what you did to Khubayb, nothing to do with your idols, your sorcery, your oppression. I am free of all of it. And he set out for Madinah.

The sincerity of his timing

There is a detail here that the people of knowledge linger on, because it tells you the quality of the man.

Most of those who entered Islam came in waves, and the waves tell a story. There was a group after Hudaibiyah, and the largest wave of all came after the conquest of Makkah, when there was no longer any reason to fight and no danger in believing. But Saeed came to Madinah before Khaybar, in one of the lowest, most vulnerable periods of the Muslim community, when there was nothing to gain and much to lose. He arrived carrying nothing but a guilty conscience and a longing for the truth.

The Qur'an itself draws a line through these timings:

Why should you not give for God's cause when God alone will inherit what is in the heavens and earth? Those who gave and fought before the triumph are not like others: they are greater in rank than those who gave and fought afterwards. But God has promised a good reward to all of them: God is fully aware of all that you do.

QUR'AN 57:10

Saeed made the cut. He came before the conquest, and he fought and gave and sacrificed with those who came early. And he came carrying something almost no one else in that company carried: he had stood in the crowd that killed a Muslim, a beloved Muslim, and now he had to walk into the city of that Muslim's brothers and live among them.

He came to the Prophet ﷺ and told him everything. He held nothing back. He asked the only question a man in his position can ask: is there a path of repentance for someone like me? And the Prophet ﷺ took him in, the way he took in all of them, and

Saeed became one of the quiet companions, praying in the rows, asking for nothing.

A man who refused the world

His family was rich and pretentious. The natural thing for such a man would have been to take his place among the comfortable. Saeed did the opposite. He decided to be done with this world altogether.

He wanted none of its wealth. He could not be bought, could not be softened, could not be flattered. He became one of those companions famous for zuhd, for turning away from the dunya so completely that he resembled the very poorest of the believers, the ones who had sold themselves entirely for the sake of Allah. He fought alongside the Prophet ﷺ in the battles that followed, a capable and skilled warrior, but his identity was never the warrior. It was the man who had let go of everything.

He narrated very few hadith. One of the few he passed on was about people like himself: that on the Day of Judgment the poor among the Muslims will be brought forward in their ranks and told to give their account, and they will answer that they left nothing behind to be called to account for, and their Lord will confirm that His servants speak the truth, and they will enter Paradise ahead of the others. Saeed wanted to be one of those people, with empty hands and nothing to be questioned about. He spent his life arranging to arrive before Allah with nothing in his pockets.

This is why Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) came to love him so deeply. Umar had no patience for materialism, none for those who craved position. And here was a man from a family of wealth who hated the dunya, carried himself with sincerity and taqwa and integrity, and impressed even the

hardest judge of men in the ummah. The two of them formed a bond in which they advised one another for the sake of Allah.

The advice he gave a Khalifah

When Umar became the leader of the believers, Saeed came to him with counsel, and it is among the most powerful things one believer has ever said to another.

He told Umar: fear Allah concerning the people, and do not fear the people concerning Allah. Let there be no gap between your words and your deeds, for the best speech is the speech confirmed by action. Do not give two different rulings on the same matter, lest you stray from the truth. Be just, and be intense in your care for those Allah has placed under you, the near ones and the ones far away alike, for they all have a right over you. Love for them what you love for yourself and your family, and hate for them what you hate for yourself and your family. And take the truth wherever it leads you, and do not fear, in the way of Allah, the blame of any blamer.

Imagine the standing a man must have to warn Umar, of all people, against hypocrisy. Umar wept when he heard it. How, he asked, am I supposed to carry all of that? And Saeed answered him plainly: a man like you, whom Allah has put in charge of the ummah of Muhammad ﷺ, with nothing standing between him and Allah, can carry it. Allah gave you this responsibility by right, because you are worthy of it. Now do justice.

The four complaints

Umar repaid the trust, and the repayment was a burden. When the city of Homs in greater Syria came under Muslim rule, Umar summoned Saeed and put him in charge of it. Saeed begged him

not to: do not make this a trial for me, leave me to the masjid, to my reading, to my worship. Umar refused, and he was angry. You people, he said, put this responsibility on my neck and then walk away from it. No. You will share it with me. And he made Saeed governor.

When Umar offered him a salary, the way he paid his governors so they could not be bribed, Saeed said he did not need it. What he already received was more than his expenses. As Saeed left, Umar gave him his charge: I am not sending you to beat the people or to dishonor them or to oppress them. I am sending you to fight alongside them and to distribute justly what Allah gives.

The reports came back, and they were all good, which surprised everyone, because Homs was a city famous for complaints, so famous they nicknamed it "the little Kufa." Umar wrote to Saeed: the people of Sham seem to love you. Why? Saeed answered: because I am there for them, I help them, and I comfort them in their need.

In time Umar came to Homs himself, the way he would arrive unannounced to check on his governors, and he gathered the people and asked them about Saeed. They said: we love him, but we have four complaints. Umar, who trusted his own reading of the man, prayed quietly that his impression would not be proven wrong, and called Saeed forward to answer the people to his face.

The first complaint: he does not come out to us until the sun has risen high. Saeed was reluctant, then explained: we have no servant in our house, so every morning I knead the dough and bake the bread myself and wait for it to be ready for my family. Then I make wudu and come out to the people.

The second: he does not answer us at night. Saeed said: I have given the daytime to the people and the night to my Lord. The nights are for prayer.

The third: there is one day a month he does not come out at all. Saeed said: I have no servant, and I own only the one garment I am wearing. So once a month I wash it, and I wait for it to dry, and then I come out.

Each complaint, dragged out of a man too modest to mention his own poverty, made the people of Homs more ashamed of having raised it.

Then came the fourth, and it was not really a complaint. It was worry. Sometimes, they said, he is sitting with us and he simply faints. He blacks out in the middle of the gathering. Is he ill? Is something wrong with him?

Saeed grew still. Then he told them what most of them had never known. I was there, he said, the day Khubayb was crucified. I was one of the polytheists. I watched them cut his limbs from his body, and I heard them ask him whether he wished Muhammad ﷺ were in his place, and I heard him answer that he would not wish the Prophet ﷺ to be pricked by even a thorn while he himself was safe with his family. And every time I remember that scene, and remember that I stood there and did not help him, I am seized by the fear that Allah will not forgive me for that moment. And when that fear takes hold of me, I lose consciousness.

Decades of Islam. The love of Abu Bakr and Umar. A lifetime of service. And still, every time the memory came, the same terror: what if I am not forgiven? It was the one thing he could not put down. And it was the very thing that drove him, that kept him pouring out good deed after good deed for the sake of Allah, a

man running his whole life toward a mercy he was never sure he had earned.

Umar was perhaps the only person in that gathering who fully understood, because he remembered Khubayb, and he remembered what those days had been. He told the people to leave the man alone. And then he said: all praise belongs to Allah, who did not disappoint me in what I believed of you.

The thousand dinars

Twice the story of the money is told, and twice it ends the same way.

Word reached Umar that his governor of Homs was destitute, that no fire was lit in his home at night, that his name appeared on the lists of the poor who receive charity. When they first showed Umar that name among the needy, he could not believe it: your governor is on the list of the poor? Umar wept until his beard was wet, knowing exactly the wealth this man had walked away from. He sent Saeed a thousand dinars with his greeting, and word to use it for his needs and his debts.

When the pouch arrived, Saeed's wife saw his face change and feared the worst, that Umar had died. No, Saeed told her, it is worse than that: the dunya has entered our house to ruin us, and fitnah has come into our home. Then help me get rid of it, she said. And that, he answered, is exactly the answer I was hoping for. The two of them divided the thousand dinars into small pouches and sent it out to the poor of the city.

The second time it happened, after years of hardship, his wife saw the money and said, at last, now we can settle our debts. And Saeed looked at her and said: shall we do something better than that? Shall we give it to those who come to us, even though

we need it more than they do, and lend it to Allah as a beautiful loan? And she said yes, and may Allah reward you. Saeed and his wife became known for those little pouches, packed by their own hands and carried out to whoever was in need.

He died in the year nineteen after the Hijrah, and he was buried in the land of Sham. He had governed a city, refused its salary, given away two fortunes, advised the Khalifah on the fear of Allah, and spent his nights in prayer and his mornings baking bread because he was too poor and too proud to complain. May Allah be pleased with him.

What Saeed's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read this and feel safe, to think Saeed's story belongs to people with blood on their hands and has nothing to say to an ordinary life. That is a mistake. His life is a question put directly to your iman, and the question is sharper than it first appears.

Begin with his fear. Saeed had every external reason to feel secure: decades of sincere service, the love of the two greatest men of the ummah after the Prophet ﷺ, a city that adored him, and a house emptied for the sake of Allah. And still he wept and fainted over a single sin from his past, terrified he had not been forgiven. We are the opposite. We carry our sins lightly and our good deeds proudly. His fear was not despair, and it was never doubt in Allah's mercy. It was the fear of a man who took Allah seriously, who knew that the One he was returning to is real, and who let that fear drive him to do good rather than freeze him. Ask whether your heart carries any of that weight, whether the thought of standing before Allah moves you the way it moved a man who had already given everything.

Then look at what he did with the fear. He did not let it crush him into inaction. He turned it into fuel. Every pouch of coins, every night of prayer, every just judgment in Homs was, in part, a man trying to outrun his own guilt toward the mercy of his Lord. That is what hope and fear are meant to do when they sit together correctly in a believing heart: not to paralyze, but to propel. The fear of falling short and the hope in Allah's forgiveness should make you reach for good, today, in the time you still have. Sincere regret over a sin is not a wound to nurse. It is a reason to act.

And look at his sincerity. He gave away two fortunes in secret, baked his own bread rather than be seen as needy, and accepted the love of Umar without ever angling for it. Everything he did, he did for Allah and not for the eyes of people. There is a direct lesson in this for a life that has no city to govern and no battles to fight. You can do one thing this week the way Saeed did everything: quietly, for Allah alone, with no one to applaud it. Give something away that no one will know you gave. Pray something in the dark of the night that no one will ever see. Forgive someone, or carry a burden for them, and tell no one. That is the texture of his whole life, and it is available to anyone.

Last, take the mercy. The deepest thing in this story is not Saeed's guilt but that Allah accepted him. A man who stood in the crowd at a believer's killing became a man Allah used to feed the poor of a great city, and the very brother he failed to help became, in a sense, part of his legacy, because the courage Saeed saw in Khubayb's dying face is what drove him into Islam. No past is too heavy for Allah's forgiveness when a person turns to Him in truth. If you carry a sin you think has placed you outside His reach, Saeed's life is here to tell you that you are wrong about

your Lord. The door is open. It was open for a man who watched Khubayb die. It is open for you.

So carry one thing from him into your ordinary days. Let the thought of Allah weigh something in your heart. Do one good deed in secret, for Him alone. And never let the size of an old sin convince you that repentance is closed, for the One who forgave Saeed ibn Amir is the same Lord you will return to. May Allah be pleased with him, accept from him the tears he could not stop, and grant us a portion of his sincerity, his fear, and his hope in the mercy of Allah.

This chapter follows the account of Saeed ibn Amir (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (25:27-28, 57:10, 3:103). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed; the identification of Saeed's uncle and of the martyr Khubayb ibn Adi follows the standard seerah reading of the events described in the lecture.

Khubayb ibn Adiy

The First Crucified for the Faith

There is a kind of test that comes when no one is watching, when the help has gone, when the people who would have stood beside you are dead in the dirt and the only audience left is the crowd that wants you to break. Most of what we call faith is rehearsed in comfort. The faith of Khubayb ibn Adiy (may Allah be pleased with him) was the other kind. It was tested on a stake of wood outside the sacred precinct of Makkah, in front of forty men who hated him, with not one believing soul among them to say his name when he was gone.

He is, in the words of Dr. Omar Suleiman, one of the most striking of all the Companions for the uniqueness of his story: a man around whom Allah gathered more miracles than almost any other, and yet a man most of us have barely heard of. His life closes one of the most painful and least remembered chapters in the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. To understand his death, you have to begin with the betrayal that led him to it.

A man of the Ansar, a man of Badr

Khubayb came from the tribe of Banu Aws, from the people of the area around Quba who first received the Prophet ﷺ when he came to Madinah. He was, in other words, one of the original hosts of the religion, one of those who opened their homes and

gave the Prophet ﷺ everything the moment he arrived. That alone would have been honour enough for one lifetime.

But Khubayb carried more. He was one of the people of Badr, a Badri, and that title in itself is among the loftiest a believer can hold. He had stayed the course with the Prophet ﷺ through Badr and through Uhud, through the first great victory and through the bitter day when so much went wrong. He was not a man who came to Islam late and easy. He was there at the foundation, and he stayed.

It is worth pausing on that, because it tells you the kind of man Allah was preparing. The tortured of the early believers, men like Bilal whose suffering became inseparable from his name, are remembered partly because their trials were so public. Khubayb's trial would be just as severe, just as unprecedented in its cruelty. But it would come at the very end, and to a man who had already given years of quiet, faithful service. The reward of Badr was already his. What happened next was something extra, a final ascent.

The treachery at al-Raji

After Uhud, a small group of Companions was sent out on a mission. Six of them were ambushed at a place called al-Raji, named, as these places often were, after a well in the hills. The men who fell upon them came in numbers, and the Companions had a quick and terrible decision to make.

Three of them chose to hunker down and fight to the end. The other three, Khubayb among them, were given assurances: come down, and you will not be harmed. We do not wish to mistreat you. We only want to take you to Makkah, perhaps for a ransom,

perhaps for a prisoner exchange. So three came down, trusting the word given to them.

The trust was a lie. The moment the men were in reach, the aggression with which they were seized told its own story. They were chained roughly, handled like prizes, and the deception was plain in an instant. One of the three, Abdullah, understood at once what was coming, seized his sword and fought back, and they killed him there. The three who had stayed and fought were already martyred. Now only two prisoners remained to be marched to Makkah: Khubayb ibn Adiy and Zayd ibn al-Dathinnah.

Both were wanted men who had fought at Badr, and at Badr blood had been spilled that Makkah had not forgiven. Khubayb had been among those who killed one of the chieftains of Quraysh, and that chieftain's family had been waiting. So the captors did the natural thing for men driven by money and revenge: they took the two prisoners to Makkah and sold them to the highest bidders, the families of the men slain at Badr.

Khubayb was purchased into slavery and marked for execution. And here something strange surfaces about the people of Makkah, a thing Dr. Omar Suleiman draws out with care: their crooked sense of the sacred. They held their prisoners through the month of Muharram, because Muharram was a sacred month and they would not kill in it. They would wait for Safar, when the killing would be, in their minds, permissible. They observed the form of sanctity while planning a murder. We will meet that same contradiction again, in a worse place.

The prisoner of many miracles

What we know of Khubayb's captivity, we know largely from the woman set to guard him: Zaynab bint al-Harith, of the household that had bought him, a woman not yet a believer, who knew only that this man had killed her father and was condemned to die. She would later become Muslim, and spend the rest of her life narrating what she had witnessed. The scholars say there is no Companion about whom more miracles are reported than Khubayb, and it is this watching woman who gives us nearly all of them.

The first thing she noticed was the smallest and, in its way, the largest. She asked the prisoner if he had any request. Think of his situation: condemned, enslaved, with a month to live. What does a man in that state ask for? He said only this: do not bring me meat slaughtered in the name of your idols. He would rather starve than eat from what was sacrificed to false gods. A man at the very end of his rope, and the thing on his mind was the purity of what entered his body for the sake of Allah. He may well be the first prisoner in history to ask for halal food. Zaynab, finding this fair enough, simply fed him without meat.

Then came the wonder she could not explain. She would come to him and find him holding a bunch of grapes, and she describes them with disbelief: grapes the size of a human head. There were no grapes growing anywhere in Makkah at that season, and she was giving him nothing of the kind. She came again, and there they were again. And again. She finally asked him where the fruit came from, since she certainly was not providing it. He told her plainly: my Lord feeds me.

For anyone who knows the Book, the echo is unmistakable, and Dr. Omar Suleiman draws it out: this is the wonder once given to Maryam, found again in one of the righteous who came after.

Whenever Zachariah went in to see her in her sanctuary, he found her supplied with provisions. He said, 'Mary, how is it you have these provisions?' and she said, 'They are from God: God provides limitlessly for whoever He will.'

QUR'AN 3:37

The miracles of the righteous always carry a resemblance to the miracles of the prophets before them, building on what the believer already knows. And there was a second resemblance hidden in those impossible grapes. The fruits of Paradise, Allah tells us, will seem familiar to the people of the Garden even as they are something else entirely:

Whenever they are given sustenance from the fruits of these Gardens, they will say, 'We have been given this before,' because they were provided with something like it.

QUR'AN 2:25

A grape the size of a head, out of season, in a city with no vines: a foretaste, perhaps, of what was waiting for him.

The second sign came as the execution drew near. Khubayb asked Zaynab for a razor. She asked why. He wished to groom himself, he said, for his meeting with his Lord, the way a man purifies himself before the sacred state, or before death.

She gave him the blade, and then, busy in the house, she lost sight of her small child. The nightmare arrived in her mind at once: the prisoner has the baby. She rushed in, and the image she found was the one she would never forget. Her son was sitting on Khubayb's lap, and in his hand was the razor. She gasped. Of course she did. Here was the leverage of a desperate man. By any standard, even the standard of the pagans around

him, he could have held the child and bought his freedom: free me, and the boy is safe.

He looked at her, the blade in one hand, her child on his knee, and he said: do you think I would kill him? We do not do that. We, the followers of Muhammad ﷺ, are not like that. He set the razor down, handed her the baby, and that was the end of it.

It changed nothing for his captors. They were not moved to mercy. But it revealed everything about the captive. Here was a man betrayed three times over, who had watched his friends slaughtered in the foulest ways, who held in his hands the one card that might have saved his life, and who would not become an oppressor to escape oppression. That is its own lesson, and Dr. Omar Suleiman names it directly: when you are wronged, do not let the wrong turn you into a wrongdoer. A person can be oppressed and then, justifying it by the wound, become an oppressor in turn, and that is the moment a believer loses the moral ground beneath his feet. Khubayb stood on that ground to the end. Zaynab, who had every reason to despise him, would say it for the rest of her days: by Allah, I never saw a prisoner better than Khubayb.

Tanim

When the sacred month had passed and the time came, they took him out to Tanim, the nearest point outside the boundary of the sacred precinct, the spot where pilgrims today go to renew their state of ihram, to step out and return to the sanctuary clean. The masjid that stands there now stands on ground soaked with this history.

Look again at the mind of these people. They would not execute inside the Haram, so they marched their prisoner just outside it,

to the very place where pilgrims renew their nearness to the House, and there they prepared to kill him in the worst way they could devise. And what they devised was something the Arabs did not even practise: crucifixion. Khubayb ibn Adiy became the first man to be crucified in the history of Islam. They raised a stake, hung him upon it, and set themselves to kill him slowly, to break his spirit before they let him die.

The men leading the torture were among the chiefs of Quraysh, with Abu Sufyan, the de facto leader of the city, among them. They cut at him piece by piece. They left him to the heat and the thirst. They wanted him broken.

Then, in their idea of generosity, they offered the condemned man a wish. What is your last request? He answered: let me pray two units of prayer before I die. They brought him down and let him pray, and he prayed quickly, two short rak'ah, and returned to them.

They were pleased to see how brief it was, reading it as fear. He set them straight. Were it not that you would think I was afraid of death, dragging out my prayer to delay it, he told them, I would have prayed much longer. But I did not want to give you the satisfaction of thinking I feared the meeting with my Lord, so I made it short to return to Him quickly. With this, Dr. Omar Suleiman notes, Khubayb founded a practice that Muslim prisoners would follow ever after: the two rak'ah of a believer who knows he is about to die, a last act of devotion offered to Allah.

They strung him back up. Picture the scene: one man, beaten and bleeding, the praise of Allah still on his tongue, and forty men around him, and not one friend among them. They tortured him almost to death, until he could barely speak, until parts of him

were gone and the blood ran freely. And then they tried the thing they had come for. They asked him: if you could be at home right now, safe, and Muhammad were here in your place, would you take it?

This is the test beneath all the others. They wanted a single word against the Prophet ﷺ, one syllable of disloyalty, because they could not comprehend the love they were looking at. And consider the trial honestly, the way Dr. Omar Suleiman asks us to. Here is a man who guarded the Prophet ﷺ for years, was sent on a mission and ambushed, whose friends were butchered, who now hangs bleeding and alone. What would it cost, in his own mind, to say one thing and be left in peace? A man under coercion of death is even excused for what his tongue is forced to say. Maybe just give them what they want.

He could barely form the words, and the words he formed were these: by Allah, I would not want to be safe and comfortable among my family while the Prophet ﷺ is pricked by a single thorn. Abu Sufyan, hardened as he was, was shaken, and said it aloud: I have never seen anyone loved by his people the way the companions of Muhammad love Muhammad. They could not extract even a flicker of regret. These men loved the Messenger of Allah ﷺ more than they loved their own lives, and on the stake of wood Khubayb proved it.

The poem on the cross

As the end neared, hanging there in the open, Khubayb began to recite poetry, and the lines that come down to us are among the most profound in the entire tradition. Dr. Omar Suleiman calls it nothing short of a miracle that Allah would let a man's heart pour out such words while his body was being torn apart on a stake.

He spoke of the tribes that had massed around him, bringing out even their women and their children to watch him hauled to the trunk of the palm. He turned from them to his Lord: to Allah I complain of my grief and my loneliness, and of what these people have prepared for my death. O Master of the Throne, he prayed, grant me patience against what they intend, for they have cut through my flesh and reached for my last hopes. It was all for the sake of Allah, he said, and if Allah willed, He could bless every severed limb of his body.

They had given him a choice between disbelief and death, and death, he said, was the better of the two. His eyes were wet, but not from any fear of dying, for he knew he had to die in any case; he feared only the Fire and its leaping flames. And then the line that became famous, repeated by believers in every age of trial: I do not care, so long as I die a Muslim, on which side I fall for the sake of Allah. I will show my enemy no fear, for my return is to my Lord.

That refrain became a motto for the believers in every later time of tribulation, and it is one to carry: O Allah, do not let me die except as a Muslim. The Prophet ﷺ had warned his Companions that hard days were coming. Khubayb was saying, in effect, that whatever else they took from him, he would keep this one thing: at least I die a Muslim, even if there is not one Muslim left around me, and I will show my enemy no fear, only my longing to be with my Lord.

Then came the last of the wonders, and the one that breaks the heart. Dying, he realised he would never see the Prophet ﷺ again in this life, and that there was not a single believer in that crowd to carry word of him home. So he called out to Allah Himself: O Allah, there is no one here to convey my salaam to

Your Messenger. Convey it to him. It is the only narration we have of a man asking Allah directly to carry his greeting to the Prophet ﷺ, because no human being present would do it.

And then he prayed against his killers, as the oppressed are permitted to do: O Allah, count them, kill them, and do not let a single one of them escape. Some of those present were so unsettled by the force of it that, clinging to an old superstition that one might dodge a curse by throwing oneself to the ground, they did exactly that. Abu Sufyan, by one account, threw his young son to the earth and lay down on his own back, and the others followed, trying to escape the supplication of a dying man they had wronged. Even disbelievers felt the weight of it. Then they dealt him the final blow to the chest, and Khubayb died, crucified, just outside the sanctuary where pilgrims go to meet their Lord.

The Prophet ﷺ knew. In Madinah, before any survivor returned, the news of al-Raji reached him on the very day it happened, and a state came over him like the state in which revelation descended. Jibril had come to tell him that Khubayb, as they crucified him, had asked Allah to carry his salaam, and the Prophet ﷺ returned that peace upon him. For a full month afterward, in every one of the five daily prayers, the Mercy to the worlds prayed against the people who had massacred his Companions in this way. The same heart that, when his own teeth were being broken at Uhud, had prayed forgive my people, for they do not know, now called down justice on those who had stooped this low.

There was one more sign. As they killed him, Khubayb kept struggling to turn his face toward the qiblah, and they kept wrenching him away to humiliate him. They left his crucified body

hanging, and when they returned they found it had turned itself toward the Kaaba, and they could not understand it. They knew, by now, that they had killed an extraordinary man. The Prophet ﷺ later sent trustworthy men on a quiet mission to recover the body, and though a long time had passed, it had not decayed in the slightest, as fresh as the day he died. They brought it back to Madinah, and the Prophet ﷺ saw what had been done to his Companion for no crime but that he had said, my Lord is Allah.

What Khubayb's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read all this as a tale of extraordinary courage and leave it there, to admire Khubayb the way we admire a hero in a story we will never live. That would miss the point entirely. His life is not a monument to stand and salute. It is a set of questions put directly to our own iman.

Start with the grapes. Before he was a man of the cross, Khubayb was a prisoner who would rather starve than eat what was slaughtered for an idol, and Allah fed him with His own hand. There is a promise buried in that. The same Lord who provided for Maryam in her sanctuary, and who provided for Khubayb in his dungeon, is the One who has taken responsibility for you. The believer's task is to keep the thing pure, to refuse the small compromise even when no one would blame him for taking it, and to trust that what he gives up for the sake of Allah will be returned from a source he cannot see. Ask yourself where, in an ordinary week, you are tempted to take the easy and impure thing because the halal road looks like it leads to hunger. Khubayb's answer was to choose Allah and let Allah provide. He was not disappointed.

Then there is the child on his lap. Wronged on every side, he still would not become a wrongdoer to save himself. This is one of

the quietest and hardest lessons of his life, and it lands in the most ordinary places: the moment someone treats you unjustly and hands you, in your anger, the justification to be unjust in return. We do that, we tell ourselves, because we were wronged first. Khubayb shows another way. Do not let the wound that was done to you become the excuse for the wound you do. To hold to fairness, mercy, and truth precisely when you have been treated unfairly is to keep the moral ground a believer must never surrender, and it is to do it for Allah, who sees both the wrong done to you and the wrong you refused to do.

And then the stake itself. Strip away the blood and the crowd, and what is left is the purest picture of ikhlas there is. Khubayb was offered his life for one word of disloyalty, with no believer present to ever know what he said, and he chose not even a thorn of harm to the Prophet ﷺ over his own safety. He prayed two short rak'ah for the sake of Allah and not to delay his death. He made his last supplication to a God he could not see, in a crowd that wished him dead, certain it would be heard. This is faith with the audience removed. Most of what we do, if we are honest, is shaped by who is watching. His final hour had no human audience worth pleasing, and still every act was for Allah alone. That is the question his death asks: when the people are gone and only Allah remains, what is your faith actually made of?

There is comfort here too, the same comfort that runs through every life lived for Allah. From the streets of Makkah, Khubayb looked like a man who had thrown his life away on a lost cause, executed and mocked and hung up as a warning. In truth he was a man whom Allah fed with the fruit of Paradise, whose body would not rot, whose face turned itself toward the qiblah after death, and whose salaam was carried to the Prophet ﷺ by the angel Jibril. What the world called a wasted death, Allah recorded

as one of the great victories. Nothing he gave was lost. Nothing he suffered went unseen.

So take something small and real from him into your own life, which will almost certainly never ask of you what his asked of him. Refuse one easy compromise this week and trust Allah to provide. Hold your tongue and your hand from a wrong you could easily justify, and do it for His sake. Do one good deed with the audience entirely removed, where no one but Allah will ever know it happened, and let that be enough. And when you fear what is coming, borrow his words: O Allah, do not let me die except as a Muslim. That is a prayer for the strong and the weak alike, and it is still open to anyone who means it. May Allah be pleased with Khubayb ibn Adiy, the first crucified for this faith, and may He grant us a measure of the certainty that let a man bleeding on a stake long only to meet his Lord.

This chapter follows the account of Khubayb ibn Adiy (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (3:37, 2:25). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Asim ibn Thabit

The One Allah Protected

There is a kind of believer the histories almost overlook. He does not lead a great battle or marry into the Prophet's house or leave a famous saying on the lips of every generation. He is one of a small group of men sent out on a quiet errand, ambushed far from home, and killed. When the books reach his story, they tend to group him with others, list the names quickly, and move on. But Asim ibn Thabit (may Allah be pleased with him) is one of those companions who, once you slow down and look closely, will not let you move on so easily. He made a single promise to his Lord, kept it with his life, and Allah kept it for him after his death in a way that left even his enemies standing in the open desert, defeated by a swarm of bees.

To understand the weight of that promise, you have to meet the man who made it.

A house built for the faith

Asim was young when the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ arrived in Madinah. He embraced Islam as a teenager, or just into his twenties, and he came into the religion through a household already shaped for it. His father, Thabit, had passed away before Islam reached them. It was his mother, a remarkable woman named Ash-Shamus, who took her son by the hand and went to

give her pledge of loyalty to the Prophet ﷺ, the two of them entering Islam together.

His was a family whose names would echo down the centuries. His maternal uncle was Hanzalah, the companion known across the ummah as the one whose body was washed by the angels, a man whose martyrdom was so honoured that the heavens themselves attended to him. His sister was Jamila bint Thabit, who would become the wife of Umar ibn al-Khattab. And Umar, who was deliberate and careful about everything, including the names of his children, loved his brother-in-law's family enough to name his own son Asim ibn Umar, after this very man. The name traveled forward from there. Generations later it would surface again in the lineage of Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, the just ruler whose life is itself a long study in faith. Legacies, like names, are handed down, and you do not give a child a name like that unless the man who carried it first was worth remembering.

There is a quiet appropriateness in the name itself. In Arabic, Asim means a protector, a guardian, one who shields and keeps safe. The word appears in the Qur'an in the account of Nuh's son, who, refusing the ark, told his father he would climb a mountain to escape the flood. The answer he received cut through every false refuge a person can run to:

But he replied, 'I will seek refuge on a mountain to save me from the water.' Noah said, 'Today there is no refuge from God's command, except for those on whom He has mercy.' The waves cut them off from each other and he was among the drowned.

QUR'AN 11:43

There is no protector from the decree of Allah except Allah Himself. The man named Asim would spend his life seeking

exactly that refuge, and he would find it. He became, in the truest sense, a guardian of the faith, and at the end he asked the only Protector who could not fail him to guard what he could no longer guard on his own.

The way a battle is fought

When the Prophet ﷺ reached Madinah, he paired the migrants from Makkah with the helpers of the city, matching them brother to brother according to their strengths and their temperaments. Asim's appointed brother from among the migrants was no minor figure. He was the cousin of the Prophet ﷺ and the first man the Prophet ﷺ ever appointed as a commander, the first to be called an Amir in Islam. In that household two young men gave themselves to long hours of prayer, long hours of remembrance, and to the defense of the Messenger of Allah. This was the soil Asim grew in: worship by night, readiness by day.

We first see him clearly at Badr. He was an archer, and more than that, he was a strategist, a man who instinctively understood the shape of a battle before it began. There is an authentic report that on the night before Badr, surrounded and badly outnumbered, the Prophet ﷺ asked the men around him for their counsel. Asim stood up with his bow in his hand. If the enemy is roughly two hundred yards away, he said, we begin with the arrows. Then he walked the ground and marked it: when they close to a certain distance, we turn to the heavy stones and the catapults. When they reach this point, we slow them with our spears. And only when they come this near, he said, marking the final line, do we draw our swords and meet them blade to blade.

He laid out the entire battle, stage by stage, on the open ground. And when the Prophet ﷺ saw what he had done, he said something that became a badge of honour among the

companions: this is how a battle is fought; whoever wants to fight, let him fight like Asim. Imagine being the man whose name the Prophet ﷺ turns into the very definition of how to stand and fight. Asim earned it. He was said to be so sure with the bow that every arrow he loosed that day found its mark. And anyone who has read how a small, outmatched community kept overcoming far larger armies knows that the archers were often the difference, and that Asim stood at the center of that.

He did not flee

Then came Uhud, and Uhud broke many things.

Asim lost his brother there, the cousin of the Prophet ﷺ, who was buried in a single grave together with Hamza. He lost his uncle Hanzalah, martyred and raised, washed by the angels, found by the companions in that blessed state. And he watched the enemy do to the Muslim dead what no honourable people would do, mutilating the bodies, making cruel examples of them to send a message back to the Prophet ﷺ. On one side stood a community that insisted on the ethics of mercy even when it was bleeding and vulnerable. On the other stood people willing to disfigure the dead. Asim stood with the first. He took his position with the archers, and when the day turned to disaster and most of the army was scattered from the field, he was among the small number who did not flee. He stayed, and he fought beside the Messenger of Allah.

It was at Uhud that Asim, almost without knowing it, sealed his own fate. Among the enemy that day was a man feared across Quraysh, a duelist so dreaded that men did not want to face him, and his wife, a woman named Sulafah bint Sa'd, had come out to the battle urging her husband and her sons forward. Two of her sons carried the banners of the enemy. In the fighting, Asim killed

them both. By the time the battle was over, her husband and all her sons were dead, and she learned that Asim, this one archer, was responsible for the deaths of her sons.

Grief can soften a person or it can poison them. In her it turned to a single burning oath. She swore by her idols that she would not rest until the head of Asim was brought to her and she had drunk wine from his skull. And because she was wealthy, she did more than swear. She put a price on his head, a bounty large enough to draw out men who had no quarrel with him at all, men who simply wanted the reward. Here is a detail worth pausing on. That same bounty, a hundred camels, had been placed on only one other head before his: the head of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself, when he fled Makkah and the pursuers rode out after him for the prize. Asim had done nothing but fight, honourably, the way a man is meant to fight on the field. And for that, his name was now spoken in the same breath, and at the same price, as the Messenger of Allah.

A protection that wraps around a man

After Uhud, the whole world seemed to tilt against the believers. The sense of invincibility that had followed Badr was gone. The enemy in Makkah felt emboldened and began to plot a return. The desert tribes, who had feared that this community was somehow divinely shielded, now smelled weakness and saw an opportunity to raid, to loot, to strike a grieving people while they were down. The hypocrites inside the city grew loud, mocking, asking where the angels of Badr had gone. Treaties wobbled. The Prophet ﷺ had to navigate all of this at once, while still burying the people he loved most in the world.

It was in this anxious, dangerous season that a delegation arrived from two Bedouin tribes. They came to the Prophet ﷺ claiming

they wanted to learn the faith, asking him to send some of his best companions, men of the Qur'an, to teach their people. It was a trap, and a particularly cruel one, because it exploited the very honour the Arabs once prided themselves on, the protection owed to a guest and a teacher. The Prophet ﷺ sent out a small group, six men by the most reliable count, under the leadership of Asim ibn Thabit.

They set out, and as they neared the place that would give the episode its name, a well in a stony region, an enemy force of more than a hundred caught up with them. The Bedouins had tracked the small party by the date stones they discarded along the road, recognizing them as the dates of Madinah. The companions fell back to high ground and took what cover they could on a hill. The attackers called out an offer: surrender, and you will not be killed. We only want to take you to Makkah, to trade you or sell you. You are outnumbered. Come down.

Six men had to decide in an instant, with no real time to confer. Three of them reasoned that surrender might mean a chance, that perhaps the Prophet ﷺ could ransom them later and they would see Madinah again; their story belongs to the weeks that followed, and to their own trial of betrayal. But Asim would not come down. He knew exactly what the people below wanted, because the prize they were after was him. And more than that, he had already made a vow, and the vow held him to the ground like an anchor.

He said he would never place himself under the protection of those who rejected God. And so they came at him. The two who stayed with him were killed. Asim fought on alone, longer than any of them, loosing his arrows until they were spent, fighting back with whatever he could find, and according to the reports

he struck down some of the very men who came to kill him. They grew so wary of him that they finally gave up fighting him at close range and simply stood back and rained arrows down on the single man on the hill.

As he fought, alone and certain of how it would end, he is remembered for words that capture everything he was. He kept declaring that he believed in what had been revealed to Muhammad ﷺ, that the life of the Hereafter was the truth and the life of this world the passing shadow. And he made a supplication, one he is said to have begun making the moment he first heard of the bounty on his head. It is among the most moving prayers a believer ever offered:

O Allah, I protected Your religion in the beginning of its affair. So protect my body at the end of my affair.

Read it slowly. This is the very definition of one of the firsts: I gave everything to guard Your religion when it was young and almost no one would stand for it. Now I ask You to guard my body when I can no longer guard it myself. Notice what he did not ask for. He did not ask Allah to spare his soul or rescue him from death; he had made his peace with martyrdom. He asked only that his body not be touched by the hands of those who had sworn to defile it. It was a precise prayer, and it would receive a precise answer.

The arrows came down until Asim ibn Thabit was martyred.

The bees and the flood

The moment they realized he was dead, the enemy forgot the other men they had killed. They had Asim, and they began to celebrate, thinking already of the reward, of the woman in

Makkah and her terrible oath, of the hundred camels. Then they climbed the hill to claim his body.

They could not reach it.

A dense swarm of bees, a living curtain, had settled over the body of Asim. When they pushed forward, the bees stung them back. They circled around to approach from the rear of the hill and found the same wall of bees waiting there too. For hours they tried, and for hours they failed, until the day began to fail with them. Perhaps, they told one another, these insects only come out in the daylight. Let us wait until morning, and then we will take him. They settled in to wait.

That night Allah sent down rain, and the rain became a torrent that rushed through the valleys, and the flood lifted the body of Asim and carried it away down the water, and they never found him. Not a hand among them ever touched him. He had asked his Lord to protect his body at the end of his affair, and his Lord answered with a guard of bees and then with a river.

This is how he earned the name the histories give him: the one who was buried by Allah, the one whom the angels guarded. When the news reached Madinah, Umar ibn al-Khattab, his sister's husband, understood exactly what he was seeing. Asim had sworn that he would never touch one who rejected God and would never be touched by one. And so, said Umar, Allah protected him in his death just as He had protected him in his life. The man's vow was kept, on both sides of it, perfectly.

There were more miracles in this stretch of the Prophet's life than in almost any other, and this was the first of them, the first sign sent back with the body of a martyr. And there is one more turn, the kind that runs through this whole episode like a thread: the astonishing death of Asim ibn Thabit, far from breaking the faith,

became a reason that some of those who witnessed it would one day come to believe. They saw what protected him, and they could not forget it.

What Asim's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a story like this and file it under bravery, to admire the archer on the hill and leave it there. But Asim has something more pressing to ask of us than our admiration. His life is a question put directly to our trust in Allah.

He made a promise to his Lord and let it govern him completely. He swore he would never put his protection in the hands of those who rejected God, and when the moment came to choose between that promise and his own survival, he did not even hesitate. Most of us make our commitments to Allah lightly and break them the instant they cost us something. Asim shows what it looks like when a person's word to his Lord is heavier than his fear of death. Ask yourself what promises you have made to Allah, in prayer, in private, in moments of need, and whether you have let the pressures of life quietly dissolve them. The believer's strength is not in never being tested; it is in holding to what he pledged when the test arrives.

Look closely, too, at the prayer he made. He did not beg to be saved. He asked only that what he could no longer protect be protected by the One who never fails. That is the deepest form of trust, *tawakkul*: to do everything in your power, to fight to your last arrow, and then to hand the outcome entirely to Allah and rest in His decree. Asim fought as hard as any man could fight, and then he let go and trusted, and his trust was not misplaced. This is the balance our faith asks of us, effort without despair, surrender without laziness. You are not asked to control the result. You are asked to be faithful and to leave the rest with Him.

And here is the part meant to lift your heart. Nothing Asim gave to Allah was lost. To the men celebrating on that hill, he looked like a defeated prisoner whose corpse was about to be carried off as a trophy. In reality he was a believer so honoured that the sky sent bees and a river to guard him, and his enemies went home with nothing. What the world counted as a loss, Allah was recording as a victory so complete that it pulled others toward the truth. This is the promise that should change how you live: what you protect for Allah, Allah will protect for you, in this life or the next, in ways you may never see coming. The believer is never truly exposed. There is no refuge from the decree of Allah except in Allah, and the one who runs to Him is never abandoned.

So take something of Asim into an ordinary day. Keep one promise to Allah this week that it would be easier to let slide. Do the work in front of you with everything you have, and then genuinely leave the result to Him without anxiety gnawing at you. And when you feel small, unnoticed, easily overlooked, remember the archer whose name the histories almost skipped, and how thoroughly his Lord remembered him. May Allah be pleased with Asim ibn Thabit, the guardian of the faith whom Allah Himself guarded, and may He make us among those who keep their word to Him and rest, in the end, in His protection alone.

This chapter follows the account of Asim ibn Thabit (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (11:43). Where the

histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abu Dujana

The Man of the Red Bandana

There are companions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ whose lives we know in their hundred turns: their childhood, their conversion, their words at the deathbed, the quarrels and the laughter. And then there are a few who are almost frozen in time, remembered for one day, one act, one flash of courage so bright that it stands in for everything else. Abu Dujana (may Allah be pleased with him) is one of these. Almost nothing is narrated about him that does not involve a battlefield. He arrives in the histories with a sword in his hand and a strip of red cloth tied around his head, and that is largely how he stays.

But to dismiss him as only a warrior would be to miss the lesson Allah hid inside his life. For when this man, this fighter who knew nothing but war, lay dying with a glowing face, and people asked him what gave him such hope of meeting Allah, he did not speak of a single sword stroke. He spoke of his tongue, and of his heart. The story of Abu Dujana begins on the battlefield. It does not end there.

A young man groomed for war

His true name was rarely used. The books record it as Simak ibn Kharasha, though even the early writers were unsure why he came to be called Abu Dujana, and the guesses about it are only guesses. He was from Banu Sa'ida, a sub-tribe of the Khazraj

and one of the more powerful clans of Madinah. If you visit Madinah today, you will find their saqifah, the shaded portico of Banu Sa'ida, preserved just outside the Prophet's Mosque, the very place where Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) later took his pledge as the first Khalifah. The clan carried a sense of leadership before Islam and after it. Its most famous son was Sa'd ibn Ubadah, a man whom the Ansar would one day have rallied behind as a candidate for the caliphate.

Into this household of standing and pride, a young man grew up doing one thing above all others: preparing for combat. He practiced with the spear and the sword, on horseback and on camelback, warming his body for the moment he was certain would come, when he would have to shine in some inter-tribal war over the kinds of petty causes the Arabs had killed one another over for generations. He was being shaped into a chief warrior for battles that, as it turned out, he would never fight. Allah had different plans for that zeal.

When Islam reached Madinah, Abu Dujana was among the three young men who went through the city disposing of the idols once the people had embraced the faith. Everything about him radiated confidence and readiness. When the Prophet ﷺ paired the emigrants of Makkah with the helpers of Madinah, joining them not by tribe but by temperament, he linked Abu Dujana with Abu Salamah ibn Abd al-Asad, one of the earliest Muslims, a man who had made both migrations and fought at Badr. Picture that pairing: two men whose lives had been a long apprenticeship in courage, waiting only to be summoned by the Messenger of Allah.

In the histories you often find a figure in Madinah who mirrors a figure in Makkah. Abu Dujana resembles the believer who had

spent his youth trained for combat and then found that the training was meant for a far higher cause than he had ever imagined. The skill was the same. Only the purpose was transformed.

The sword with a condition

Then came Uhud, and Abu Dujana was perhaps twenty years old.

In the histories there is a chapter in Sahih Muslim titled simply the virtues of Abu Dujana, and our hero steps fully into the light there through the eyes of az-Zubayr ibn al-Awwam (may Allah be pleased with him), the Prophet's own cousin, who watched the whole thing and never forgot it. The Prophet ﷺ had a way of opening a battle by bestowing a special honor on someone, and there is always a divine wisdom in whom he chose. On this day, before the fighting began, the Prophet ﷺ held out his own sword and asked, "Who will take this sword from me?"

Think of what that meant. This was greater than carrying any banner, greater than holding any cloth. This was the sword of the Messenger of Allah himself. And the Prophet ﷺ, though he fought in the front lines, was a mercy: he would strike and knock down and never deliver a killing blow. So to take up his sword was to wield, on his behalf, the very thing his own hand held back from.

Hands shot up. Abu Bakr, Umar, Ali, the familiar ones, all reached out: I will take it, I will take it. It was the chance of a lifetime, a virtue no one else in the histories is recorded as receiving. And then the Prophet ﷺ added a condition. "Who will take it with its right?" The hands came down. They hesitated, sensing that something heavy had just been attached to the offer. Who would take it with all that it demanded, with everything that came with

it? Then one man stepped forward and said, "I will take it, O Messenger of Allah, with its full right." It was Abu Dujana. The Prophet ﷺ later explained the right of that sword: that the one who carried it would not strike down a fellow believer with it, and would not flee from the enemy, no matter what. The Prophet ﷺ was, in a sense, foreseeing how this day would unfold, a day on which many would be scattered and chased. And he handed the sword to the young man who had pledged not to run and not to turn it on his own.

Az-Zubayr admits, with the honesty that runs through these accounts, that something stirred in him when the sword passed to Abu Dujana instead of to him. "I am the son of Safiyyah, the aunt of the Messenger of Allah," he said to himself, "and I am from Quraysh." He resolved to watch this man closely in the battle, unable to understand why he had been passed over. There was a wisdom in it he did not yet see. The Prophet ﷺ was not only honoring an individual; he was distributing the honor among the people. To keep bestowing every distinction on the emigrants of Makkah would have sent the wrong message to the helpers of Madinah. And beyond that, this was simply what Allah intended for Abu Dujana.

The bandana of death

Az-Zubayr kept watching, and the next thing he saw became the image by which Abu Dujana is remembered forever. The young man reached out and drew a red bandana, and he tied it around his head. At the sight of it, the Ansar grew excited and said to one another, "He has put on the bandana of death." This was his signal. Before every battle he would draw out that strip of red cloth and bind it on, and all the helpers would know that

something had shifted in him, that he was entering a different mode.

The companions had their marks. One wore a yellow turban at Badr, and it was said the angels descended bearing the same. Abu Dujana had his red bandana. And then, with it tied on, he did something that struck az-Zubayr as strange. He began to strut. He walked with a swagger in front of the Muslim ranks, then walked right up before the disbelievers of Quraysh, turning and twisting the sword in his hand, taunting the enemy openly. He recited his lines of poetry as he went: he was the man whose beloved friend had taken from him an oath, near the date palms, that he would never stand in the rear ranks but would fight at the front with the sword of Allah and His Messenger.

Now, the Prophet ﷺ taught humility. This was not humility. And here is one of the great lessons buried in Abu Dujana's life. The Prophet ﷺ watched this proud, strutting display, and he did not condemn it. He did not call the young man out or tell him this is not how we behave. Instead he said that this was a kind of walk Allah hates, except in a moment like this one. Allah dislikes arrogance and boasting, but the Prophet ﷺ understood that the battlefield has its own psychology. There is a time and a place. Abu Dujana was showing the enemy no fear, though the Muslims were badly outnumbered, and in doing so he was lifting the morale of his own side. The Prophet ﷺ himself, in the thick of Hunayn, would declare aloud, "I am the Prophet, this is no lie, I am the son of Abd al-Muttalib," naming his father in a way he would never have done in ordinary times. The Prophet ﷺ did not break the young man's spirit. He redirected it, and he let it burn.

Cutting through the ranks

When the fighting began, az-Zubayr, himself a man of huge arms and great skill, found that he could not stop watching Abu Dujana. The young man put on his armor, set his broad shoulders, and went forward finishing his opponents one after another, moving through the enemy ranks so swiftly that az-Zubayr could scarcely believe it.

Then az-Zubayr noticed a man on the other side, a warrior cutting down everyone in his path, coming forth and slaughtering people the way animals are slaughtered, methodical and merciless. He watched the two of them, Abu Dujana mowing forward, the enemy champion mowing toward him, drawing closer and closer. The opponent was the bigger man, with the better armor; a wounded companion watching from the ground did not think it would go well for the Muslim. The two finally met. The larger man struck. Abu Dujana intercepted the blow, turned it aside, and with a single answering stroke he killed him.

Az-Zubayr says it was as quick as that: one block, one blow. And in one of the most vivid touches in the whole account, the witness on the ground describes how Abu Dujana, knowing he was being watched, lifted his face covering, looked back as if to say, what did you expect, and then pulled the covering down again and kept fighting. The man had courage to spare, and confidence, and the Prophet ﷺ had seen it in him.

He cut his way through the entire enemy line, az-Zubayr says, in what felt like the blink of an eye, from the front all the way to the rear. And when he reached the back of the army, he found women there, chanting poetry to rouse their men: if you advance we will embrace you, but if you flee like cowards there will be no more love between us. He had moved so fast that he came suddenly upon a figure beneath his raised sword, who shrieked

and revealed her face. It was Hind, the wife of Abu Sufyan, the woman who that very day would have the liver of Hamza torn from his body, the one driving the enemy forward, hungry for revenge.

And here Abu Dujana did the thing that az-Zubayr could not stop wondering about afterward. He pulled the sword back. He let her go. Later az-Zubayr came to him and said, in effect, I loved everything I saw you do today, and now I understand why the Prophet ﷺ gave you the sword instead of me. But there was one thing I have to ask about: you had Hind beneath your blade, and she was an active part of this battle, and you held back. He was not saying you should have killed her. He was simply astonished that a man in that fury, in that mode, sword swinging left and right, could stop himself. And Abu Dujana answered, "I realized that she was a woman, and the sword of the Messenger of Allah is too noble to strike a woman." He would not taint the trust that had been placed in him. The Prophet ﷺ had taught these men to spare the woman, the child, anyone not fighting, even the trees and the animals, and Abu Dujana carried that ethic into the heat of the moment, when it would have been easiest to forget it.

The body that shielded the Prophet

That was the first half of Uhud, and had the battle ended there, Abu Dujana would already stand among its great heroes, the young man who demoralized an army three times the size of his own by cutting clean through it.

But the battle did not end there. When the archers left their position on the mountain, the enemy swept back around and struck the Muslims from behind, and the day turned. This is where the profiles of courage emerge, the ones who died trying to shield the Messenger of Allah while arrows rained down with

the single aim of killing him. Abu Dujana belongs to a group of young men from the Ansar who, in that moment, chose to surround the Prophet ﷺ rather than flee.

The imagery is almost unbearable. Abu Dujana made his own body a shield for the Prophet ﷺ, throwing himself over him to intercept every blow he could. The arrows came and came into his back until, in the words of the account, he looked like a hedgehog, so covered with shafts that those nearby had to peer over him to see whether the Prophet ﷺ was still alive. That is how much of the Messenger's body he was trying to cover with his own. A man came forward shouting, "Muhammad! Show me Muhammad! By Allah, either I kill him or I die," poking his sword toward the Prophet ﷺ around the human shield in front of him. And Abu Dujana, his back already a thicket of arrows, did not break. He took his sword and felled the attacker. He survived. It was a kind of miracle that he lived through that day at all.

When the battle was over and the Prophet ﷺ returned, he gave the sword, which Abu Dujana had carried the whole time, to his daughter Fatimah to wash the blood from it, and he praised how its bearer had done right by it. The young man had honored the trust completely: he had not struck a believer, he had not fled, he had shielded the Messenger of Allah in every moment. And of him the Prophet ﷺ said the words that crown his life: "O Allah, be pleased with him as I am pleased with him."

There were companions after Uhud who lived on but were, in a sense, walking martyrs, men who had given so much it was as though they had already died in the cause. Abu Dujana was one of them.

A life on the front line, and a quiet end

He did not relent. The histories show him on the front line of every battle that followed. At Hunayn, when only a handful stood firm with the Prophet ﷺ and the rest had scattered, Abu Dujana went forward and changed the momentum of the day by cutting down the enemy's standard-bearer. In the farewell Hajj, the Prophet ﷺ appointed him governor of Madinah in his absence, a sign of how much he was loved and trusted. His was a life of stepping forward when few others would.

His last battle was Yamamah, against the false prophet Musaylimah, a man who had crucified people simply for refusing to call him a prophet. The fighting reached a fortified garden, and the only way to turn the tide was for someone to go over the wall into it. Abu Dujana asked to be lifted to the high point of the fortress, and he called out that he was no man of disgrace, no coward at heart, no weakling, and that there was no good in people who turned their backs on their faith. Then he leapt down into the garden and broke his leg in the fall. He fought on from the ground, striking once at Musaylimah, and afterward it was never settled whether it was his blow or another's spear that killed the false prophet. An arrow found his chest. His eyes lifted to the sky, and he left this world doing the only thing he was ever known for: standing in the front, fighting for the sake of Allah.

He left behind a wife and a single son, and he had named that son Khalid, after the great warrior. It tells you what filled this man's heart.

There is a famous story about Abu Dujana that the early sources do not chain back with a verified narration, so it is told only for the moral in it. It is said that after the prayer he would hurry away, skipping his usual supplications, and when the Prophet ﷺ asked why, he explained that he had a Jewish neighbor whose tree

leaned over into his yard. Sometimes the grapes or dates would fall on his side, and out of a sense of trust he rushed to gather them and return them, because he did not feel they were his to keep. Whether or not the chain is sound, the picture of his scrupulousness fits the man.

What Abu Dujana's life asks of our faith

And here is where his life turns, and asks something of ours.

When Abu Dujana fell sick with the fever that would take him, the people came to pay their final respects, and they found his face glowing as if it were the moon. They asked him the natural question: what is it that gives your face this light, what are you seeing, what gives you such hope as you go to meet Allah?

Imagine the answer a man like this could have given. The man of the red bandana, who took the sword with its right, who cut through an army and shielded the Prophet ﷺ until his back looked like a hedgehog, and earned, with his own ears, the prayer "be pleased with him as I am pleased with him." If anyone had a portfolio of deeds to lean on at the edge of death, it was Abu Dujana. He could have spoken of his heroics, his sword, his standing in every battle beside the Messenger of Allah.

He spoke of none of it. He said there were two things that gave him hope of meeting his Lord. The first: "I never used to talk about things that did not concern me." He minded his own affairs; he stayed out of what was not his business. The second: "My heart toward all of my brothers and sisters was always pure. I never held anything against any of them." Not his hand. Not his sword. Not his courage. He pointed to a clean tongue and a clean heart, to the struggle against his own self and against the whispers of shaytan, which is harder than any battle on any field.

Sit with that. The fiercest warrior of his generation, at the end, staked his hope on the smallest and quietest of things, the things any of us can do, that need no broad shoulders or skill with a sword. He had understood what the Prophet ﷺ was building in these men all along: that the outward feats are not the measure, that a person's Islam is made beautiful by leaving what does not concern him, and that a heart kept free of rancor toward other believers may weigh more on the scale than a hundred victories.

So what does his life ask of you, in your ordinary days, where there are no battlefields and no swords? It asks you to take seriously the two things he chose. Guard your tongue from what is not your concern, the gossip, the speculation, the eager dissecting of other people's lives, and turn that energy toward Allah instead. Empty your heart of grudges against your brothers and sisters, the old resentments you nurse in silence, and meet Allah with a clean chest. These are not small acts of mere good character; they are acts of faith, done for the sake of Allah, in the places where no one is watching and no one will ever praise you for them. If a man who gave his body to shield the Prophet ﷺ feared he would arrive before his Lord with nothing better to offer than a pure heart and a restrained tongue, then how much more carefully should we, who have done so little, tend to these two things today.

There is mercy in this for us. It means the door is not closed to the one who has no great deeds. The quality to imitate is the one Abu Dujana put at the very top of his hope: sincerity in the unseen corners of the heart, where iman is either real or it is nothing. Strive there, against yourself, for Allah alone, and you walk in the footsteps of the man of the red bandana more truly than if you carried his sword. May Allah be pleased with Abu Dujana, who shielded His Messenger with his own back and met

Him with a clean heart, and may Allah grant us the harder courage he died hoping in: a guarded tongue, a heart without rancor, and deeds done for no eyes but His.

This chapter follows the account of Abu Dujana (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed, and one story noted as lacking a sound chain has been marked as such.

The Amwas Plague

The Year the Companions Were Gathered

The companions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had a particular picture of how they would leave this world. They had spent their lives on the move, marching toward the sound of battle, certain that if death was coming for them it would come from the front, on a field, with a sword in their hands. They prayed for shahada, and in their minds shahada wore armour. So it must have unsettled something deep in them when the thing that finally came for them was not an army at all. It was a sickness. It moved through a small town in the land of Sham, and before it was finished it had taken around twenty-five thousand of them, gathered in a single season, many of them among the very greatest people who ever walked after the Prophet ﷺ.

The place was called Amwas, and the year it spread became one of the heaviest the young ummah had yet known. To stand in that land today is to stand among graves that hold names you would not believe were buried so close together. And what those names left behind is not a record of panic or despair. It is, almost unbearably, a record of peace. Each one of them, as the decree of Allah reached for his life, answered it with the same thing: contentment, tranquillity, a heart fully pleased with its Lord. That is why their story is worth sitting with slowly. They show us, more clearly than almost anyone, how a believer is meant to stand when Allah strikes him with a trial he never saw coming.

The shirtless one whom no sword could touch

Among the first of them is a man many people have never heard of, and his life is astonishing. He came to Islam already wealthy and already famous for war, skilled in every art of it, fearless to a degree that frightened his enemies. When he met the Prophet ﷺ, he did not ease into faith. He asked a single, enormous question: "I own a thousand camels. Should I donate them all for the sake of Allah?" The Prophet ﷺ told him that if he gave them all, it would be a profitable transaction. He gave all one thousand, and then he gave himself.

After that he was in nearly every major campaign. He fought the Persians, the Romans, deep into Africa, a man who seemed to belong to no single battlefield because he belonged to all of them. His most famous moment came at the battle of Ajnadayn, the engagement that broke the back of Roman resistance in that region and changed the whole direction of the war. There, in the middle of the fighting, he did something no rational soldier does. He took off his armour. He took off his shirt. And bare-chested, holding only his sword, he went through more than thirty of the enemy without taking a single scratch. The Romans could not understand it. They began to call him the shirtless devil, because no man should be able to strip away his protection and move that fast and that surely through a line of trained men. But of course he was no devil. He was a believer who had already sold everything he owned to Allah and feared nothing that a body could lose.

At the battle of Yarmuk he rode out with a battalion, and every man in it was killed and entered the ranks of the martyrs, except him. He came out untouched. He stood beside the great commanders, and when the enemy saw him they did not see one man, they saw an army. And then Allah gave him a different kind

of shahada altogether. This warrior, too skilled to be reached by any blade, was reached by the plague of Amwas. The man who could not die in battle died in his bed, a martyr all the same, because Allah had decided that his shahada would not look the way he had always imagined it.

The trustworthy one of this ummah

A little further on lies a man the Prophet ﷺ honoured with a title that had once belonged to the Prophet ﷺ himself. The people of Makkah had called Muhammad ﷺ al-Amin, the trustworthy, before they had ever called him anything else. The scholars say there is no other person upon whom the Prophet ﷺ placed that same word and let it become his name. To be al-Amin is not only to be truthful. It is to be the one who always carries your best interest, who is selfless for the sake of the whole community, who can simply be relied upon.

He was among the first ten to embrace Islam, one of the ten given the glad tidings of Paradise in this life. He was a master of war, the only man known to move with equal skill as an archer and a foot soldier, able to read a battlefield from the tracks left behind in it and tell the Prophet ﷺ exactly what he would face. When he became Muslim his own father turned on him so violently that the persecution nearly erased him from the city. At Badr, his father came for him in the fighting, and he was made to face the unthinkable and strike him down for the sake of his faith. He was handsome and gentle and eloquent, yet if you met him you would notice two missing teeth and a slight catch in his speech. The reason is one of the most moving in the whole seerah: when the Prophet ﷺ had the rings of his helmet driven into his blessed face, this man pulled the metal out with his teeth

until his own teeth broke, and it marked his speech for the rest of his life.

When the time came to govern the vast land of Sham, all of it, Syria and Lebanon and Jordan and Palestine, the trust fell to him. He built mosques across the region and is credited by some historians with founding among the first true hospitals in the world. When disaster struck elsewhere, he sent relief; in the famine remembered as the Year of Ashes, he sent thousands of camels of aid from Sham to Madinah. And yet when the leader of the believers came to visit and tried to enter his house, this man asked him gently not to go in. He went in anyway, and found nothing. No confiscated treasure, no hoard taken from the public wealth. The governor of all Sham owned almost nothing at all, and the leader of the believers wept, and the man told him, this is exactly why I did not want you to come inside.

When the plague spread through his lands, that same leader did not want to lose him, and a question passed between them that every believer should carry. He was asked, in effect, are you running from the decree of Allah? And the answer became one of the great lessons of this religion: "I am running from the decree of Allah to the decree of Allah." He explained it with an image of grazing camels: if you have a piece of land, one side green and one side barren, and you choose to put your camels on the green side, you have done that by the decree of Allah; and if you choose the barren side, that too is by the decree of Allah. We do not know the unseen. We act by cause and effect, we take the means Allah gave us, and whatever follows was always His. So the people were to take precaution, and that precaution was itself His decree.

Knowing this man would never abandon his people to save himself, the leader of the believers sent a letter summoning him to Madinah, without explaining why. And the trustworthy one understood completely. He wrote back: I know what you are doing, but I am content with the decree of Allah, and I will stay here with my army. I will not leave the people to die and go to be saved. When that reply was read, the leader of the believers wept, and those around him asked if the man had died. Not yet, he said, but he will not last long, because he will stay in the middle of the plague serving the people. That is exactly what happened. As the sickness took him, he turned to those around him and reminded them that all the children of Adam will die, and that the most intelligent among them are the ones who prepare for that day. He was only in his fifties. He had spent his whole life preparing.

The one whom the Prophet loved, and his last word to his son
Nearby rests a young man whom the Prophet ﷺ loved so openly that the Prophet ﷺ once took him by the hand and said, "By Allah, I love you." Imagine being told that by the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. And the love around this man multiplied. In the mosque of Damascus people would gather around him, drawn by his beauty, his radiant character, his knowledge. One companion sat beside him and said simply, "I love you for the sake of Allah," and was told in return the glad tidings the Prophet ﷺ had taught: that those who love one another for the sake of Allah will be under His shade on the Day of Judgment.

This young man came to the Prophet ﷺ in his youth and distinguished himself at once with his intellect, his literacy, and his love of the Qur'an, so much so that the Prophet ﷺ named him among the very few from whom the Qur'an should be taken, and

called him the most knowledgeable of the ummah in what is permitted and forbidden. When the Prophet ﷺ sent him to Yemen to teach, he gave him love and advice together. He told him not to leave off saying, after every prayer, a short and now-famous supplication asking Allah for help to remember Him, to thank Him, and to worship Him with excellence. He told him it might be that they would not meet again, that he might return to Madinah and find only a grave and a mosque. The young man wept. And the Prophet ﷺ comforted him with words for all of us: that those closest to him are the people of piety, whoever they are and wherever they are.

It was to this man that the Prophet ﷺ once asked how he would judge in Yemen. By the Book of Allah, he said. And if it is not there? By the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. And if it is not there? Then I will strive to form my own judgment, drawn from them. The Prophet ﷺ struck his chest with gratitude that the one he had sent would teach the people in a way that pleased him.

The plague took his whole family before it took him. He lost everyone he loved, and the histories preserve what may be the last conversation between him and his most righteous son as the sickness reached the boy. The father said to him, in the very words of the Qur'an:

The truth is from your Lord, so do not be one of those who doubt.

QUR'AN 2:147

And the son answered him, also in the words of the Qur'an, with the reply Ibrahim's son once gave his father at the moment of his own trial:

Father, do as you are commanded and, God willing, you will find me steadfast.

QUR'AN 37:102

That was their farewell in this world, two believers handing each other the Book of Allah as the decree closed over them. The son went first. Then, as death came for the father, he had already buried everyone, and his own last words were a kind of longing: O Allah, take me, You know that my heart loves You. He had narrated more than anyone the teaching that this plague was a path to shahada. He knew exactly what was happening to him, and he welcomed it.

A mother, a verse, and a son who would not give up his faith

Among those gathered in this land is a younger brother who watched, as a boy, an argument that would shape a verse of the Qur'an. His older brother had insisted on entering Islam, and their mother refused to allow it. She swore she would not eat or drink, that she would let herself waste away, until he abandoned this religion. The son loved his mother and begged her to eat and to care for herself, and yet he would not give up his faith for her. He brought his pain to the Prophet ﷺ, and Allah sent down guidance that has steadied believers ever since:

We have commanded people to be good to their parents, but do not obey them if they strive to make you serve, beside Me, anything of which you have no knowledge: you will all return to Me, and I shall inform you of what you have done.

QUR'AN 29:8

Be good to them, in everything except this. Honour them, serve them, soften your heart to them, but do not follow them away from Allah. The younger brother who witnessed all of this could not migrate the way his older brothers did. The persecution pinned him in place, so he made his way to Abyssinia and stayed there with the believers under the protection of a distant land, far from the Prophet ﷺ he longed to be near. He did not get the years with the Prophet ﷺ that he wanted. When he finally arrived, much of the time was already gone. But he spent whatever was left of it pouring himself into the cause of Allah, and then he too came to rest in this land, far from where he began, his faith intact to the end. It is not certain that he died in the plague itself; it is one of the reports that he may have been among those Amwas took.

The quiet commander whose name the land still carries

The last of them in this account barely speaks in the histories, and that is itself a lesson. He was one of those who wrote down the revelation, a man who was almost silent except on the battlefield, where he was anything but. He was among the first to accept Islam in Makkah, and like so many who lie in Amwas he was an early migrant. He made not one hijra but two, first from Makkah to Abyssinia, then from Abyssinia to Madinah, with his mother, who had also raised him, beside him in faith.

Then he gave his life to service in the army. The books say there was hardly a campaign in that region in which he was not a central commander; at the battle of Yamama he was second only to the great general himself. Much of what is now Jordan and Palestine owes its Islam, under Allah, to this quiet man who carried the message into city after city. He was so senior that when commanders needed to move from one front to another, he

was the one trusted to hold their place. And when the plague came, he died on the very same day as the trustworthy one of this ummah. Try to feel the weight of that. In a single day the believers lost the governor of all Sham and one of the foremost commanders of their armies, two pillars at once, to a sickness no one could see or fight.

There is something quietly devastating in how ordinary this kind of grief became. Generations later, when the world was struck again by a swift, invisible illness that no one could name or trace, believers reminded one another that this was not new, that the ummah had stood in exactly such a place before, in the days of these very companions, and had met it with patience and trust. They were people like us. They feared. They lost the ones they loved. And they held on to Allah. This commander, the one whose efforts still echo through a whole region named in his memory, was among those who showed them how.

What the Amwas plague asks of our faith

It is tempting to read about twenty-five thousand companions taken in a single season and feel only the scale of it, to be moved and then to move on. That would be a loss. Their gathering in that land is not a sad chapter to be admired and closed. It is a direct question put to our own iman, and it is sharper now than it has ever been, because we have lived through our own season of fear.

They had decided, all their lives, how their shahada would look. It would come in battle, by the sword, on their own terms. And Allah, who loved them, gave them something else entirely. Here is the first thing their lives ask of us: are you willing to let Allah write the end of your story, even when it does not match the picture you had drawn? The trustworthy one said it for all of them. We

run from the decree of Allah to the decree of Allah. We take every means He has given us, we are careful, we protect ourselves and others, and then we hand the outcome back to the One who owned it from the beginning. That is the difference between a believer and a man who thinks he is in control. Both take precautions. Only one of them has peace, because only one of them knows that whatever comes was always from Allah, and that Allah is never unjust to the soul He created.

The second thing their lives ask is harder, and it is about contentment. Notice that not one of these men, as the sickness reached him, complained against his Lord. The governor who owned nothing did not ask why he should die after a life of giving. The one whom the Prophet ﷺ loved, who had just buried his entire family, did not turn bitter; he asked Allah to take him because his heart still loved Him. The father and the son did not bargain or grieve into despair; they handed each other verses of the Qur'an. This is *rida*, being pleased with the decree of Allah, and it is not a feeling that arrives by accident. It is built, the way the trustworthy one built it, across a whole life of trusting Allah in small things, so that when the largest thing comes the heart already knows how to bow. When your own hardship comes, and it will, your share of their inheritance is to meet it without a word of complaint against Allah, certain that He sees, certain that He is wise, certain that nothing you lose for His sake is ever truly lost.

And the third thing is the most hopeful. Look at what these losses really were. A man too skilled to die in battle, given a martyr's death in his bed. A whole region brought to Islam by a commander so quiet the books barely quote him. Aid sent across a famine by a governor who kept nothing for himself. From the outside, a plague that empties a land of its best people looks like pure catastrophe. But Allah was recording every one of those

deaths as a shahada, and the Prophet ﷺ had taught them, before any of it, that this was so. What looked like the ummah being hollowed out was the ummah being gathered, name after name, into the highest ranks. This is the promise that should change how you spend an ordinary day: what the world counts as loss, Allah may be writing as your salvation. The illness you fear, the ending you did not choose, the quiet service no one notices, the wealth you give away and never see again, none of it is wasted with Him. He keeps what is given to Him.

So take one thing from them into your life today, for the sake of Allah. Take a precaution and then truly leave the result to Him, with a calm heart, the way the trustworthy one did. Give something away that no one will know about. Hold steady through one trial without complaining to your Lord. Say, after your prayer, that small supplication the Prophet ﷺ loved enough to press upon the one he loved: O Allah, help me to remember You, to thank You, and to worship You well. That is how these companions lived, in trust, in sincerity, in contentment, and it is a way still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with all the martyrs of Amwas, may He fill their graves with light, and may He gather us, when our own decree closes over us, in their patient and beloved company.

This chapter follows the account of the martyrs of the Amwas plague in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2:147, 37:102, 29:8). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed; a few of

*the companions are described as the recording leaves them,
without forcing names the source does not make certain.*

Burayda ibn al-Husayb

The Man No One Expected

For more than a decade the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had called his people to Allah, and the public response had been mostly cruelty. The open invitation had been a hard and demoralising thing, both for the Prophet ﷺ and for the believers who carried it with him. Believers had been beaten in the streets of Makkah. Some had fled across the sea to Abyssinia. Some had been starved in a boycott that herded the Prophet's whole clan into a barren valley. Some had been tortured to death. And now, at the close of those years, the believers were fleeing again, this time to Madinah. When the Prophet ﷺ finally left Makkah, he left with very few followers to show for so much patience. He had even gone to Ta'if hoping for a better reception, and had not found the welcome he hoped for there. By any ordinary measure, the call had cost everything and gained almost nothing.

And yet, even now, the Prophet ﷺ was not thinking only of his own survival. As he moved through the desert with Allah shielding him from his enemies, he was still thinking with the heart and mind of a man calling others to Allah. He never took off that banner. Wherever he went, even as a hunted man on the run, he wore it. That is the man we have to keep in view as the road unfolds, because it explains everything that happened next.

It was in the middle of all this, on the long road of the Hijrah, that the Prophet ﷺ met a man whom history would otherwise never

have noticed. His name was Burayda ibn al-Husayb (may Allah be pleased with him), and his story is the story of the person everyone overlooks.

The least known of the road

Of all the figures the Prophet ﷺ encountered on the journey from Makkah to Madinah, Burayda is the least famous. He has no great lineage that the storytellers loved to recite, no early conversion among the first believers, no dramatic entry into the books. He was a tribal chief in the desert, far from the noise of Quraysh, a man whose name carried no weight in Makkah and none yet in Madinah.

That very obscurity is why he matters. The Prophet ﷺ had spent more than ten years pouring his heart into a city that mostly rejected him. He had watched the powerful close their hearts. And now, exhausted, hunted, near the end of a punishing journey, he was about to be reminded that Allah's plans do not run on the world's accounting. The man no one had heard of would do, in a single conversation, what an entire decade in Makkah had struggled to do.

A meeting in the dark

The Prophet ﷺ and his companion were in the final stretch of the road, close now to Madinah, worn down by the desert and the days. Anyone who has reached the last leg of a long journey knows that strange weariness, when the body is spent and the destination is almost in reach. It was late at night. The air was dark. And out of that darkness came a tribe, led by a chief of imposing presence.

This was the moment that could undo everything. A bounty had been placed on the Prophet ﷺ in Makkah, a hundred camels for whoever brought him back, and others had already given chase along the road. A chief and his men, meeting two travellers alone at night, might well mean capture. After the whole journey, this could be it: someone might finally claim that prize and drag him back to Makkah. Anyone running for his life, recognised in such a place, would feel the urge to flee, or at least to hide who he was. With every word, the danger was real, that one of these men might suddenly say, "It is him," and reach for the reward.

The Prophet ﷺ did neither. Before the chief could ask the obvious question, "Who are you?", the Prophet ﷺ spoke first and asked it himself: who are you? It was a small thing and a brilliant thing. A fugitive does not interrogate the man who finds him. By asking the question first, the Prophet ﷺ quietly took hold of the conversation and signalled that there was nothing here to fear, only two travellers who had come upon good company in the night.

The chief answered, "My name is Burayda."

Good omens in the desert

The Prophet ﷺ had a habit the books preserve again and again: he heard goodness in things, and he named it aloud. He was never superstitious, never looking for bad signs, but he loved an optimistic word, and he found one here. The name Burayda shares its root with the Arabic word for the coolness of cold water, the relief of something that has settled and cooled. So the Prophet ﷺ turned the man's own name into a blessing and said that their affair had now cooled and been set right.

Then he asked the man's clan, and the answer carried its own quiet promise of ease, so that the Prophet ﷺ remarked that their matter had now been made smooth. He read these names the way he read the world: not as a hunted man bracing for the worst, but as a servant of Allah who trusted that good was coming and was willing to say so.

Look at how the encounter had turned. A meeting that could have ended in chains had become, in a few sentences, a meeting between travellers and a friend. Only then did Burayda put the question back: and who are you?

"I am Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah"

The Prophet ﷺ did not hide. Standing in the open desert, a fugitive with a price on his head, he answered plainly: I am Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah. And he did not stop at his name. He delivered the message itself, then and there, to a stranger and his armed men in the middle of nowhere. He told Burayda of one God, the Lord of the heavens and the earth, that he himself was His Messenger receiving revelation, that his own people had driven him out of Makkah, and that he was now going to another people who were waiting for him.

Consider what this asks of a person. He was tired, exposed, and at risk. The safe thing was to give a name and move on. Instead he was still carrying the banner of the call, still thinking with the heart and mind of a man inviting others to Allah, even while Allah was protecting him from the very people who wanted him dead. He never set the mission down. Protection and message were one thing to him, and he would not separate them.

Burayda, for his part, was a simple and direct man. He did not argue or stall. He asked, "How do I embrace your religion? How

do I become one of you?"

Seventy at once

The Prophet ﷺ told him what Islam was. Then Burayda did something that revealed the kind of leader he was. He said to wait, and he went to his people, seventy of them, and told them what he had heard. And all seventy followed their chief into Islam.

Sit with that number against the backdrop of the road. In Makkah, ten years of preaching, ten years of beatings and boycott and exile, had won relatively few. Here, on the way to Madinah, in a single night, an entire tribe entered the religion. No group in Makkah, for all the labour poured into that city, had come to Islam the way these people did, all at once, captivated by the Prophet ﷺ in the middle of nowhere. The same message that the powerful of Makkah had spat upon was received whole by a desert chief and the seventy souls who trusted him. They stayed with the Prophet ﷺ long enough to learn the basics of their new faith, and seventy people who had gone to sleep that night outside of Islam woke saved from the Fire.

It is hard to overstate the mercy hidden in this. All the pain of Makkah, all the rejection from the Prophet's own relatives, and then in the empty desert Allah gave him a tribe larger than any group that had embraced him in the city he had just left, and gave it to him in a moment. The contrast was the lesson. You never stop giving the call. You never underestimate the person in front of you, or the moment you are standing in, or the influence one honest exchange can have. The man the world would have walked past was, that night, the doorway to Paradise for seventy people.

The banner and the long road after

Burayda asked the Prophet ﷺ where he was headed, and urged him to stay with them awhile. The Prophet ﷺ explained that he was bound for Yathrib, soon to be Madinah, where his people awaited him. Then Burayda did something fitting for a chief greeting a king he had just recognised. He took off his turban, tied it to his staff, and made of it a standard, telling the Prophet ﷺ that he should not enter the city as a hunted man slipping in unseen, but under a banner, as one who arrives with honour. The Prophet ﷺ took it.

Burayda's tribe remained Muslim, and Burayda himself would join the Prophet ﷺ in Madinah some time after the battle of Uhud, taking his place among the companions. And here the quiet, unknown man becomes something the famous companions could not have been. Because his face was known neither in Makkah nor in Madinah, because no one had reason to recognise him, the Prophet ﷺ could send him where the well-known could not go. He went among Bani so-and-so to listen and ask, a man who could move unseen, and he learned that a surprise attack was being planned against the Prophet ﷺ. The very anonymity that might have made another man feel small made Burayda exactly the right man for the mission. His being overlooked by the world became useful in the service of Allah.

It is worth pausing to see where Burayda fits in the whole arc of that journey, because the Hijrah was a chain of gifts, each one larger than the last. It had begun with humiliation, the Prophet ﷺ slipping from his own bed past the men sent to kill him. Along the way there was a miracle at a humble tent in the desert, where a barren sheep gave milk at his touch. There was a prophecy spoken to a pursuer who had come for the bounty, that the treasures of the mightiest empire on earth would one day fall to this faith. And then, near the end, before he even reached the

city, there was Burayda: a tribe larger than any that had embraced him in Makkah, given to him in a single night in the middle of nowhere. Each incident on that road carried its own lesson, and Burayda's was that Allah keeps His best provisions in the places no one thinks to look.

Burayda did not remain in the shadows forever. He grew into a great fighter who stood in many battles. And on the day Makkah was finally conquered, the day the Prophet ﷺ returned in triumph to the city that had cast him out, Burayda was among those chosen to carry a flag at the front of the army. Picture the scene: the noble companions of Makkah returning home in victory, and walking proudly among them, bearing a standard beside the Messenger of Allah, this once unknown chief from the desert night. He went on to narrate roughly thirty to forty hadith from the Prophet ﷺ, so that his words still reach us. He was among those who marched out to Tabuk. And in the end he died a Muslim, and was buried in Madinah, in service of the faith he had embraced in a single conversation on the road.

What Burayda's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read the famous companions and feel that holiness belongs to people with great names and great beginnings. Burayda is the answer to that fear. He was the man no one expected, met in the dark, and Allah made his life one of the brightest moments on the road of the Hijrah. His story is not here to make us admire him from a distance. It is here to ask something of our own iman.

The first thing it asks is that we trust Allah's accounting over the world's. By every visible measure, the Prophet ﷺ left Makkah with little to show for ten years of suffering. Then, in one night, Allah handed him a whole tribe. What looked like loss was the

prelude to a gift the city had refused. This is the promise to carry into your own ordinary life: Allah is not bound by the slowness you can see. The years that feel wasted, the call that seems to go nowhere, the good you do that no one answers, none of it is lost in His sight. Keep working, and let Him keep the books.

The second thing it asks is sincerity in the small encounter. The Prophet ﷺ was exhausted and in danger, and still he gave the full message to one man in the desert because that man's soul was worth it. He did not weigh whether Burayda was important enough to bother with. He never looked past a person. So do not look past the people in front of you. The cashier, the neighbour, the relative everyone ignores, the stranger met once: any of them may be the seventy souls hidden inside a single conversation. Sincerity for Allah means treating the unnoticed moment as if it matters to Him, because it does.

The third thing it asks is that we stop measuring our own worth by the world's attention. Burayda was anonymous, and that anonymity, which the world counts as nothing, became the very thing Allah used. If you feel small, unseen, passed over, hear this: the eye of Allah is not the eye of the crowd. He has work that only the overlooked can do, and a place for the quiet servant at the front of the army on the day that counts. Your obscurity is not an obstacle to Him. It may be your qualification.

So take one thing from him into this week. Believe that your unanswered effort for Allah is being recorded even when nothing changes. Give one person your full sincerity, the way the Prophet ﷺ gave it to a stranger in the night, expecting nothing back. And if you feel unseen, offer that to Allah too, content that He sees you, and ask Him to use you in the way He used a man no one expected. May Allah be pleased with Burayda ibn al-Husayb, who

answered in a single night what a city had refused for years, and may He gather us among those who never stop calling to Him and never look past the soul in front of them.

This chapter follows the account of Burayda ibn al-Husayb (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). No Qur'an verses are quoted, as the source narration of this episode cites none directly; its Qur'anic themes (Allah's hidden provision, the worth of every soul, steadfastness in the call) are referred to in prose. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Suraqa ibn Malik

The Bounty Hunter Who Was Caught

There is a kind of man who is interested in only one thing. Before Islam and after it, in every age, you find people who give their whole lives to a single craft and care for almost nothing else. Suraqa ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) was such a man, and his craft was war. He was a tracker, a scout, a hunter of men across open country. He knew the desert the way other men know their own homes. He could read a stretch of empty sand and tell you how many had passed and what they rode, counting the footprints of men and the footprints of their animals until the bare ground told him its secret.

He lived on the outskirts of Makkah, out where the city thinned into wilderness, near the country that would one day be remembered for the battle of Hunayn. He was not a city man. He was a man of the open land, and he had spent his life listening to the ground rather than to the talk of the people. So when a new message began to stir in Makkah, when a man named Muhammad began to call his people to the worship of one God, Suraqa let it pass him by. It was not his affair. He had heard nothing, learned nothing, and wanted nothing of it. He was a hunter, and he was waiting, as hunters do, for the right prey.

The bounty

Then the right prey appeared. When the Hijra happened and it became known that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had escaped Makkah, Abu Jahl announced a bounty on his head. The price was a hundred camels.

It is hard, across the centuries, to feel the weight of that number, so it is worth slowing down over it. A hundred camels in that world was not a reward, it was a fortune. It was the kind of wealth that ended a man's worries forever. Think of the finest animals every tribe could put forward, gathered into the hands of one person, the way you might imagine a fleet of the most expensive cars a man could own, all of them his at once. A hundred camels meant you were set for the rest of your life. And the order behind the bounty made no fine distinctions. Dead or alive, it did not matter. Bring him back breathing or bring back his body, the price was the same.

The histories say that as many as four hundred men went out into the country looking for him. Some of them hated his message and wanted him dead for it. Many of them did not care about his message at all. They wanted the hundred camels. A man can be hunted by people who do not even know why they want to kill him, and the Prophet ﷺ was, in those days, the most wanted man in the world.

Suraqa, who had ignored the whole affair of Islam, who had not bothered to listen to a word of it, heard about the bounty and knew at once that this was his. No one in the desert could find a fleeing man the way he could. He was the most capable tracker alive, a skilled horseman, a reader of the ground. He gave his word that he would do it. *I will find him, and I will bring him back to you within three nights.* And he set out.

The horse that sank

He picked up the trail and followed it the way he had followed a thousand others, and at last, across the distance, he saw them. The Prophet ﷺ was ahead of him, and the Prophet ﷺ glanced back toward the rider closing in behind him.

Then something happened that Suraqa had no name for. He would tell the story himself, years later, and the wonder never left it. As the Prophet ﷺ turned and quietly invoked his Lord against the pursuer, Suraqa's horse plunged into the ground beneath him and threw him from the saddle. It had never done such a thing before, not once in all his years of riding it. He picked himself up, uneasy. Something was strange here. Something was happening that did not happen.

But a hundred camels is a hundred camels. He climbed back on and rode after the Prophet ﷺ again, and this time the horse sank deeper, and threw him harder. And the Prophet ﷺ, the hunted man, the fugitive with a price on his life and the whole desert at his back, did not so much as flinch. He did not quicken his pace in fear. He went on as calmly as a man with nothing in the world to worry about.

Suraqa was a man without a religion. He had no Lord to call upon, no faith to steady him. So he reached for the only thing he trusted: chance. He pulled out his arrows, the way the Arabs cast lots when they wanted an answer from the unseen, the way a man flips a coin or throws the dice. *Should I go on, or should I stop?* He cast them, and they pointed him away, toward the opposite direction, away from his prey.

And still he said to himself, *a hundred camels. I am not going to let a hundred camels go.*

He got back on his horse and pressed in once more, and this time he came so close that the distance between them collapsed. He could hear the Prophet ﷺ, and the Prophet ﷺ could hear him. He was nearly upon him. He had only to throw his rope. And the earth took his horse a third time and flung him to the ground.

The man who begged the man he was hunting

Something broke in him then. Not his pride exactly, but his certainty. The hunter who had never failed understood, at last, that he was not going to win this hunt. He called out to the Prophet ﷺ across the sand, and the words that came out of his mouth were not the words of a bounty hunter. *Invoke your Lord to set me free, and I give you my word I will not harm you. Pray that Allah releases me, and I will not touch you. I only want to come and speak with you.*

The Prophet ﷺ supplicated, and the ground let Suraqa go. He rode up to the man he had set out to capture, and the two of them spoke in the middle of the empty country, the most wanted man in the world and the tracker who had been sent to drag him back dead or alive.

What Suraqa said next is worth hearing in full, because of who was saying it. He did not understand the religion. He knew nothing of the message, nothing of the theology, nothing of what this man was calling people toward. But he had seen enough that morning to know that he was in the presence of something he could not explain. *It is clear to me, he said, that whatever this affair of yours is, it is going to spread across the whole world.* And so he asked, not for camels, not for mercy in the moment, but for the future. He asked the Prophet ﷺ to write him a guarantee of safety, a pledge that when this affair reached his own land, he would be left in peace.

Think about the strangeness of it. A man who had come to kill was now asking his intended victim for protection, and protection not from the present danger but from a future victory he was suddenly certain would come. And the Prophet ﷺ gave it to him. He had him write it down, an amnesty, a contract of safety for the day Islam would arrive at Suraqa's door. The Prophet ﷺ could have ended the threat with a single thrust of a spear, there in the open where no one would have known. He did not. His ambitions were larger than the morning, his heart wider than the danger in front of him. He let the man who had hunted him ride away with a promise in his hand.

And Suraqa, who no longer cared at all about the hundred camels, tried to give something back. *Here is my arrow*, he said. *I have camels and servants in such a place. Show them this and they will know you are sent by me. Take whatever you want of them.* The Prophet ﷺ answered simply: *I have no need of your camels. Go.*

The bracelets of Kisra

So Suraqa turned his horse and began to ride away, leaving the Prophet ﷺ alone in the desert, still hunted, still exposed, with hundreds of other men somewhere out there in the same country, all of them wanting the same hundred camels. It was, by any ordinary reckoning, the most vulnerable position a man could be in.

And from that position, the Prophet ﷺ called out to the back of the departing bounty hunter. *How will it be, Suraqa, when you are wearing the bracelets of Kisra?*

Kisra was the emperor of Persia, the most powerful man on the face of the earth. The Persians had a crown, and a royal robe,

and a pair of golden bracelets that were famous across the world as among the most precious belongings any human being possessed. And here was a fugitive, fleeing for his life across the sand, telling a desert tracker that one day those very bracelets would be in his own two hands.

Suraqa looked back at him. *Is there another Kisra we do not know about?* Because surely this could not mean the Kisra, the ruler of Persia, the master of an empire. Surely the words of a hunted man in an empty land could not reach all the way to the throne of the most powerful kingdom on earth. The Prophet ﷺ only smiled at him, and walked on.

Suraqa rode away with two things he had never expected to carry: a written promise of safety, and a prophecy too large to believe. He had come for a hundred camels and a corpse. He left having been told that something far greater than a hundred camels was waiting for him, and that the hand that would one day hold the wealth of emperors was his own.

The promise kept, twice over

The profile of the man holds true to the end, in its own quiet way. He did not rush. He went, in time, to Madinah and accepted Islam and stayed with the Prophet ﷺ, then returned to Makkah. And he kept the paper. He held on to that guarantee of safety year after year, folded and waiting, the way a tracker holds a thing he knows he will need.

The next time he is found standing before the Prophet ﷺ, roughly a decade has passed. The conquest of Makkah is unfolding, the city that had once put a price on the Prophet's head now opening before him, and Suraqa comes forward through the crowd. *Do you remember,* he begins, and the Prophet

ﷺ remembers. The whole encounter in the desert is still there between them. *I knew Allah would give you victory*, Suraqa says. *And I bear witness that there is one God, and that you are the Messenger of Allah.* He had waited all that time, holding his document, for the moment he could come and say, simply, *remember this*. And so he became a companion.

Then time moved on past all of them. The Prophet ﷺ passed away. The years that came after carried the young community into a war they had no business surviving, against the Persian empire, the same Persia that had fought Rome for some seven hundred years, the same Persia that looked down at the Muslims as nothing more than desert bedouins, a people forever picking and harassing from the edges. In the span of a single year, Allah gave the believers victory over that empire. They entered its most luxurious palace, the great white palace of Mada'in, which men of that age called the largest palace in the world, and they carried out its treasures. The reign of Kisra was over.

When the spoils came back to Madinah, to be laid before the treasury, all of it arrived: the wealth, the robes, and the famous golden bracelets. And Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) stood on the minbar holding them up. He called for Suraqa. He put the bracelets of Kisra into the hands of the old bounty hunter, the man who had once chased the Prophet ﷺ across the sand for a hundred camels, and he said that the one who had foretold this had spoken the truth. Look, he was saying to all of them, look what has come true before your own eyes. The most improbable transfer imaginable, the treasure of the most powerful man on earth resting in the hands of a desert tracker from the outskirts of Makkah, exactly as a hunted man had promised in an empty land long before.

Suraqa had gone out to catch the Prophet ﷺ. Instead he was the one who was caught, caught not by a rope but by a glimpse of something true, and the blessing he stumbled into that morning followed him all the way to the bracelets of an emperor.

What Suraqa's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read this story as an adventure and stop there, to enjoy the sinking horse and the impossible prophecy and move on. But Suraqa's life is not an adventure to be enjoyed. It is a question put to our own iman.

Begin with the calm of the Prophet ﷺ in the desert, because that calm is the first lesson. A man with a price on his head, hunted by hundreds, with a tracker closing in behind him, simply proceeded, unfazed, certain of his Lord. He did not run faster. He did not despair. His peace was not in his circumstances, because his circumstances were as bad as a man's can be. His peace was in Allah, who had promised him that this affair would not be abandoned. That is what trust in Allah looks like when it is real: not the absence of danger, but stillness inside it, because you believe His promise more than you believe the threat in front of you. Most of us lose our peace at the first sign of trouble. He kept his with the whole world at his back. When fear comes to you, and it will, Suraqa's story asks whether your trust in Allah is deeper than your fear of what you can see.

Then look at Suraqa himself, and at how Allah reaches a heart. Here was a man who had ignored the message completely, who wanted nothing of religion, whose whole interest was in a hundred camels. Allah did not need him to be a scholar or a saint first. Allah turned him with the ground beneath his horse, with a single morning he could not explain, until a hunter who had come to kill was begging for safety and sensing, dimly, that he stood

before the truth. No one is beyond that reach. Whatever you have ignored, however far you feel from caring, the same Lord who softened a bounty hunter in the open desert can soften you. And the lesson runs the other way too: do not write off the hard hearts around you. The man chasing the Prophet ﷺ for blood money became a companion. Make the quiet supplication for the people you have given up on, the way the Prophet ﷺ never gave up on the man hunting him.

Notice, too, what the Prophet ﷺ did with his power over an enemy. He had Suraqa at his complete mercy and chose mercy, because he was building something larger than a single safe morning. He could have ended the threat and did not. There is a quality here to take into an ordinary life: when you are wronged, when someone is in your power and the small, immediate satisfaction of striking back is right there in your hand, you can choose the wider thing instead. You can leave a door open. The Prophet ﷺ left a door open for a man who had come to kill him, and a decade later that man walked through it, bearing witness to Allah.

And hold on to the promise at the center of it all, because it is the same promise made to you. A hunted man told a tracker, in an empty land, that the wealth of emperors would one day rest in his hands, and it came true to the letter, years after the man who spoke it had died. What Allah promises, Allah delivers, even when the promise seems impossible, even when the one who made it is gone, even when seven hundred years of empire stand in the way. The believer's task is to act on the promise before the proof arrives, the way Suraqa kept his folded paper for a decade because he knew, somehow, that the day would come. Allah has made promises to you too, of provision, of mercy, of a reckoning that sets every wrong right, of a reward kept safe for what you

give Him. Live as though those promises are as certain as the bracelets of Kisra turned out to be, because they are more certain still.

So take one thing from him into your own life today. Steady your heart with Allah's promise in the middle of a worry you cannot fix. Make a sincere supplication for one person you had decided was beyond reach. Choose, once, to leave a door open for someone who wronged you, for the sake of Allah rather than the sake of being right. That is how a hunter became a companion, and the road he found in the desert is still open to anyone who will walk it. May Allah be pleased with Suraqa ibn Malik, who set out to catch the Messenger ﷺ and was caught instead by faith, and may Allah grant us the trust to believe His promise before we see it kept.

This chapter follows the account of Suraqa ibn Malik (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed. No Qur'anic verse is quoted, as none was cited in the source.

Umm Ma'bad al-Khuza'iyyah

The Woman Who Described the Prophet

There is a tent in the story of Islam that almost no one would have noticed. It stood on the dry outskirts of Makkah, in a year when the rain had failed and the land had nothing left to give. Inside it lived a poor woman and her husband, far from the affairs of the city, the kind of people travelers pass without remembering. And yet it was in that beaten tent, in a brief conversation between a wife and her husband, that the most beautiful description of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ ever spoken was set down, and carried into history.

Her name was Umm Ma'bad al-Khuza'iyyah (may Allah be pleased with her), and to understand how a stranded traveler's kindness became one of the treasures of this religion, you have to begin on the road of the Hijra.

A journey wrapped in tranquility

The Prophet ﷺ left Makkah as a hunted man. Quraysh had set a great price on his head and laid a plot to kill him, and the desert ahead would be searched from many directions at once. By every measure of the world, this was the moment of his greatest danger and his least protection. And yet what the seerah remembers about that journey is not fear. It is calm. The Prophet ﷺ moved through it with sakina, with a stillness and a trust in Allah so complete that even the creation seemed to bend to

shelter him. He had already said the words that defined the whole journey: do not grieve, Allah is with us.

He was not alone. With him was his closest companion, Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him). With them rode a guide, a man who knew the desert as few others did. He was not yet a Muslim, this guide, and that was part of the wisdom of it, because Quraysh would not suspect a man who was known to be outside the faith. He was a friend of Abu Bakr, trusted, an expert of the terrain, and he had crafted the very path they would take, a road no one would think to watch. To carry a man with a bounty on his head, while having no faith of your own to gain from it, takes a rare kind of integrity, and he had it. There was also a freed shepherd among Abu Bakr's people who would later die as a martyr, and behind them, slipping in and out of the journey, the children of Abu Bakr, Asma and Abdullah, who carried food and watched for news.

These few moved out into the open desert, plotting their way north and west, away from the city that wanted them dead. And it was somewhere on this road that they came upon a tent.

The tribe in a year of hardship

The woman of that tent belonged to the tribe of Khuza'a. They were a noble people, once the leading tribe of Makkah before Quraysh took that place from them, and now they were settled across much of the outskirts of the city. In time Khuza'a would become an ally of the Prophet ﷺ, and years later it would be an attack upon them, in violation of the truce of Hdaybiyyah, that broke that treaty and opened the road to the conquest of Makkah. But all of that was still far in the future. For now they were simply a tribe trying to survive a hard season.

Umm Ma'bad lived at the edge of things. Picture, if you have ever traveled outside a city in that part of the world, a single tent pitched far from anyone, a person sitting beside a few animals and whatever little they have to offer a passing stranger. That was her life. The year had been cruel. The drought had thinned her flock and emptied her stores. Her husband, Abu Ma'bad, had gone out into the wilderness searching for some sustenance, some provision to bring back, because what they had at home was almost nothing.

And in the middle of that scarcity, she was known for something. She cared for the wayfarer. When travelers came struggling through that difficult country, she would serve them: a little water, milk from her goats when there was any, the shade of her tent for an hour, whatever she could spare. This was a goodness that existed in her before Islam ever reached her, and it is one of the lessons of her story that Allah honors such goodness wherever He finds it. The Prophet ﷺ taught that people are like buried mines, and that the best of them in ignorance can be among the best of them once guided. Umm Ma'bad was a mine of generosity waiting to be opened.

The Qur'an names exactly the kind of person she already was, the one who gives to the traveler with no thought of return:

Goodness does not consist in turning your face towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travellers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times

of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God.

QUR'AN 2:177

The skinny goat

Four men arrived at her tent and asked if she had anything to drink. She did not know who they were. She told them the truth: that this was a difficult time, that they had nothing much and nothing little, that she could barely squeeze a few drops of milk these days, that her husband had gone out searching for food. She was being kind to strangers, as she always was, but she had nothing to give them except the shade over their heads.

The Prophet ﷺ asked whether she had any goat or sheep with milk in it. She answered with an oath, swearing by his own mother and father that if she had anything at all to offer, she would have offered it. There was nothing.

Then his eyes fell on a single goat in the corner of the tent. It was so weak it had been left behind when the rest of the flock went out to graze, a thin and exhausted animal that looked as though it had nothing to give anyone, not even itself. He asked her what was wrong with it. She told him plainly: it can barely sustain its own life, it has nothing left over for anyone else. He asked if she would mind if he milked it. She looked at the man, and she looked at her animal, and as a Bedouin woman who knew her own goat she told him, in effect, go ahead, but you will not get a thing. You can squeeze its udders all you like; there is nothing there.

He took the goat. He said Bismillah. He passed his hand over it, and prayed for the blessing of Allah upon it, and the udders of that starving animal filled with milk. He called for her largest vessel and milked it until the container was full, full enough for

everyone in that tent. Then came the detail that tells you who he was. He did not drink first. He gave it to her, the woman of the house, and told her to drink until she was satisfied. Then he gave it to his companions, one after another, and only when every one of them had drunk did he drink himself, last of all. The guide of these people, the one they followed, was also their servant. He milked the goat a second time, filled the vessel again, left it with her, and only then continued on his way.

What she said about that moment has lived for fourteen centuries. She watched this stranger, worn from a hard road, and she saw that he had been thirsty, and that he had served everyone before himself. And she said that she loved him more than she loved herself. When she saw him drink, it was as though she herself had been nourished. Her own thirst left her, not from the milk, but from the sight of him no longer thirsty. She had no idea what she was witnessing. She only knew that something in this man had reached straight into her heart.

The most beautiful description

When the four had gone, the goat they left behind was still giving its milk, and into this strange abundance walked Abu Ma'bad, home at last from his empty search. He saw at once that something had changed. He asked his wife what had happened, what was the source of this blessing that had appeared in his absence. She told him that a blessed man had passed through, and described his condition, and his manner. And her husband, sensing there was more, said to her: describe him to me. Tell me what he looked like.

What followed is the conversation that history remembers. Think of where it happened: a worn tent on the edge of the desert, a husband and wife alone, no scribe, no audience, nothing to

suggest importance. And in that quiet exchange a woman gave, from a few minutes of acquaintance, the fullest portrait we have of the most influential man who ever lived. The scholars note that those who live close to nature learn to observe it finely and to speak of it with care, and Umm Ma'bad was such a woman. She had seen the creation of Allah all her life and knew how to describe it. Now she turned that gift on a single face she had looked at for only a few minutes, and she missed nothing.

She said his cleanliness was remarkable. This is no small thing for a man at the end of a hard journey, when travel marks a person and dust clings to everything. His appearance was immaculate. His face was luminous, lit from within. He was beautiful in every part and perfectly proportioned, no bulging stomach, his head and frame in balance, handsome and complete. His eyes were wide and his eyelashes long. His voice had a clarity to it, a perfect pitch, with a slight sharpness that carried without any need to be raised. His neck was long and graceful, like the neck of a gazelle. His beard was thick. The whiteness of his eyes was very white and the black very black, a striking contrast, and his brows arched and were so full that they seemed almost to meet, though they did not. His hair was deeply dark.

Then she described the way he carried himself, and here the portrait moves from the body to the presence. When he was silent, she said, he was wrapped in dignity, an aura of quiet honor surrounding him. And when he spoke, it was as if a light came out of that dignity. He was the most beautiful and captivating of people from a distance, the kind of man you stopped to look at and wondered who he was, and when he came close he was more beautiful still. This is the opposite of what we expect, for usually the nearer you come the more the flaws show; with him,

nearness only deepened the wonder. His speech was clear and full of meaning, never too short and never too long, the words falling in order like the beads of a necklace coming off one at a time. When he spoke, no one else spoke; everyone listened. When he gave a command, they hurried to obey. He was dignified and respectful, never frowning, never harsh, never one to refuse. For all the awe he commanded, he gave that same respect back to everyone around him; his presence made people shrink, and his kindness opened the way back to him again.

She finished with a verdict: I have never seen a man like him, before or after. Through that tent had passed countless travelers, countless faces, and this, she said, was the most remarkable human being she had ever seen. Her husband listened, and understood. By Allah, he said, this is the companion of Quraysh they have been speaking of. Word of what was happening in Makkah had reached even this distant tent. And he said: I wish I could be his companion, and if I find a way, I will take it. In time both of them did. They sought out the Prophet ﷺ and entered Islam.

The voice no one could trace

While this was unfolding at the tent, something stirred back in Makkah. A voice rang out through the city, and no one could find its source. It carried lines of poetry blessing the One who watches over His people, praising the companions who had come to the tent of Umm Ma'bad, who arrived in their beauty and departed in success. Prosperous, the voice said, is whoever follows Muhammad ﷺ. Go and ask Umm Ma'bad, it said, ask her about her sheep and her vessel, for even the goat would bear witness to him if you questioned it.

When word of this reached the Muslims, Hassan ibn Thabit (may Allah be pleased with him), the poet of the Prophet ﷺ, answered it with verses of his own. The thrust of his reply was a lament turned upside down: how wretched are the people of Makkah, that they let this man slip out from among them, that they allowed Muhammad ﷺ to leave their ranks and make his Hijra. And how blessed, by contrast, are those who went out to receive him. He had departed from a people undeserving of his company and arrived among a people more deserving of it, people who would see in him what others, blinded, had refused to see.

There is a quiet justice in that. The city that had everything, that had the Prophet ﷺ in its midst for years, drove him out into the desert. And the poorest woman at the edge of the world, who had nothing, gave what little she had to a stranger and was given in return a place in the memory of this ummah forever.

What lasted

The blessing of that day did not end when the travelers rode on. The brother of Umm Ma'bad later embraced Islam, and he became one of the very few people ever recorded as a martyr connected to the conquest of Makkah, a conquest that came almost without bloodshed; he lost his way on the road and was ambushed and killed before reaching the city. Umm Ma'bad herself lived long after the Prophet ﷺ and died a natural death, carrying to the end the honor of her description of him.

And the goat. That thin, exhausted animal that could barely stand, the one she had sworn would give nothing, kept giving its milk. Not for a day, not for a season. The histories record that it went on producing milk for years, all the way until eighteen years after the Hijra, a year of famine, when the rest of the land had dried up again and that one goat, touched once by the hand of the

Prophet ﷺ and his Bismillah, was still full. A single moment of his presence had left a blessing that outlasted the drought, outlasted the famine, and very nearly outlasted the woman herself.

What Umm Ma'bad's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read this story for its beauty alone, to enjoy the picture of the Prophet ﷺ and move on. But Umm Ma'bad's life puts a quieter question to our own iman, and it begins with the smallest of her actions.

She was generous before there was anything to gain from it. She served strangers in a year when she could barely feed herself, milking her goats for travelers she would never see again, offering shade when she had nothing else to offer. No one was watching. No reward was promised. She did it because kindness to the wayfarer was simply who she was. And it was precisely into that habit of unseen generosity that the Prophet ﷺ walked. Here is the lesson for an ordinary life: the good you do quietly, when no one is keeping score and nothing is owed to you, is not wasted. Allah sees the tent on the edge of the desert. He knows the small kindness done in scarcity, and He can make it the doorway through which your whole life changes. Do one good thing today for the sake of Allah alone, something no one will ever know about, the way she milked a goat for strangers, and trust that He has recorded it.

She gave from her poverty, not her surplus. We tell ourselves we will be generous when we have more, that giving belongs to people with plenty. Umm Ma'bad had a single starving goat and a tent, and she still wished she had something to give. The barakah of this religion does not come from how much we have but from how willingly we open our hands with the little we hold. The same hand of the Prophet ﷺ that filled an empty goat can fill a life that

feels empty, but it tends to fall on those who were already trying to give.

And notice what moved her heart. It was not a sermon. It was watching a man serve others before himself, drink last, carry hardship without complaint. She loved him before she knew who he was, because character is its own argument. That is worth carrying into our own days. The most powerful call to Allah we will ever make is not in what we say but in how we live: serving before we are served, giving before we are asked, bearing our difficulties with the calm of someone who truly believes that Allah is with us. People are still won the way Umm Ma'bad was won, by the sight of a believer whose faith has made him gentle, generous, and unhurried in the face of fear.

Above all, her story is a window onto the One she came to love. Behind the filling of the goat, behind the unseen voice in Makkah, behind the journey wrapped in tranquility, was the care of Allah for His Messenger ﷺ and for a poor woman who had been faithful to her small light. He took her quiet generosity and answered it with guidance, with milk that outlasted a famine, and with a name remembered for fourteen hundred years. That is how He deals with those who turn toward Him. What we give in scarcity, He returns in abundance. What we do in obscurity, He raises into honor in His own time.

So take her into your ordinary life. Be generous before it is convenient. Serve before you are served. Live in such a way that someone, watching you for only a few minutes, might glimpse something of the faith you carry. May Allah be pleased with Umm Ma'bad, who fed the stranger and was given the Beloved ﷺ to describe, and may He make us, like her, people whose small and hidden kindness becomes the means of our nearness to Him.

This chapter follows the account of Umm Ma'bad (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2:177). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abu Musa al-Ash'ari

The Voice That Carried the Qur'an

If you had asked the companions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ who their favourite reciter of the Qur'an was, who they would have wanted to crowd around and listen to for hours, who they imagined hearing again in Paradise, almost all of them would have pointed to one man. He was short and slight, with no commanding physical presence at all. But when he opened his mouth to recite, a city stopped to listen. The Prophet ﷺ himself stood at people's doors at night to hear him. The wives of the Prophet ﷺ came out of their homes to listen. And the Prophet ﷺ said of him that he had been given one of the beautiful voices of the family of David.

His name was Abu Musa al-Ash'ari (may Allah be pleased with him), and his story begins not in Makkah or Madinah, but far to the south, in a teenager's heart in Yemen that had heard a rumour worth crossing a desert for.

A teenager who went looking for the truth

His given name was Abdullah ibn Qays, but like his contemporary Abu Hurayrah, history knows him by his nickname. He was a young man in Yemen, no more than fourteen or fifteen, when traders passing through brought word of a man in Makkah who claimed to be a Prophet and was calling people to a new way. Most teenagers would have let the rumour pass. Abu Musa did

not. He joined a caravan and travelled all the way from Yemen to Makkah to see for himself who this man was and what he was calling to.

When he reached the Prophet ﷺ and heard him, he embraced Islam at once. He is, in fact, one of those who accepted the faith in Makkah itself, in its earliest and hardest years. But the Prophet ﷺ did not keep him in Makkah. He sent the young man back to his own people, to a distant part of Yemen, to await further instruction and to call his tribe, the Ash'ariyun, to Islam.

And he succeeded. His family believed. His tribe believed. His own two brothers, Abu Ruhm and Abu Amir, accepted the faith at his call, and he was the youngest of the three. Even his mother, Zabiya bint Wahb, would one day come with him and die a Muslim, buried in al-Baqi. For years he waited among his people, receiving word now and then on how to pray and how to hold to the faith, until permission finally came to make the journey to Madinah.

The two boats, and the joy in Madinah

About seven years after the Hijrah, around the time of Khaybar, Abu Musa and roughly fifty of his tribe boarded a boat in the south of Yemen, meaning to sail up the coast to Madinah. But the winds turned against them. Day after day the weather pushed them off course, until they found themselves not approaching Madinah at all, but landing instead on the far shore of Abyssinia, the Christian kingdom that had once given refuge to the first Muslims who fled Makkah.

It seemed an accident. It was not. Waiting on that shore was a group of the Prophet's companions who had migrated to Abyssinia years before and were now themselves preparing to

leave for Madinah. Among them was Ja'far, the cousin of the Prophet ﷺ, whom the Prophet had not seen in years. The righteous king, the Negus, had secretly embraced Islam and had quietly readied boats for Ja'far and his companions, telling them that if anything ever happened to him, they were to sail at once. So when Abu Musa's storm-tossed boat arrived, Ja'far told the newcomers what the Prophet ﷺ had told them: stay until Allah opens a way. And they stayed, until at last they all boarded together to sail for Madinah as one company.

Now picture what was about to happen. Two boats, full of people, sailing toward a shore where the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself would receive them. On one side, Ja'far and the long-separated emigrants of Abyssinia. On the other, this fresh group from the southern tip of Yemen, men who had never once laid eyes on the Prophet ﷺ and were trembling with anticipation to meet him. The Prophet ﷺ told the companions in Madinah that a people were coming whose hearts were even softer toward faith than their own, even though they had never met him. And as the boats neared the coast, the people aboard began to sing: tomorrow we will meet our beloved ones, Muhammad and his companions. It was the same line Bilal would whisper on his deathbed years later.

When they landed and began to greet the companions, the narrations say this was the first time the handshake, the musafaha, was practised as a group, as two communities introduced themselves to one another in joy. The Prophet ﷺ met Ja'far and kissed him on the forehead and said he did not know which gift brought him more joy, the conquest of Khaybar or the coming of Ja'far. And to Abu Musa's tribe, the Ash'ariyun, he gave a rank above those who had emigrated only once. Because their boat had drifted, because they had been carried to

Abyssinia before reaching Madinah, they had become people of two migrations. You have the reward of two hijrahs, he told them: a migration to the Negus and a migration to me.

The houses you could find by their sound

Once settled in Madinah, this tribe became known for one thing above all others: the Qur'an. They came to the Prophet ﷺ and asked him to recite to them, and when he did, they wept. Their love for the Book became the texture of their nights.

There is a hadith that captures it better than any description. The Prophet ﷺ said that he knew the voices of the Ash'ariyun by their Qur'an when they entered upon the night. He knew which houses in Madinah were theirs, not because he had seen them go in by day, but because of the recitation that rose from those homes after dark. Imagine that. A whole tribe so devoted to the Qur'an that the Prophet ﷺ could walk the streets of Madinah at night and say, that one is theirs, and that one, and that one, by the sound alone.

They were known for more than their recitation. If the Ash'ariyun went out together and food ran short, they would gather what little they had, divide it equally on a single cloth, and share it without complaint. The Prophet ﷺ loved this in them: their generosity, their care for one another, their attachment to the Book of Allah.

And at the head of these people was Abu Musa. The histories make a point of mentioning that he was very short and very thin, and they mention it for a reason. His stature was not what made him a giant among the companions. It was that voice. When he walked into a gathering, every head turned toward him, the way they once turned toward Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, who was also

small of frame. Everything the old society had prized, height, presence, the imposing body, was being quietly set aside. What mattered now was what a man carried in his heart.

Reciting for One Listener

There is a tender moment narrated by our mother Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her). She was walking with the Prophet ﷺ at night when he stopped outside a house and began to listen to the Qur'an being recited within. Come, he told her, listen with me. And the two of them stood together at the door and listened for a long while. It was Abu Musa.

When Abu Musa later learned that the Prophet ﷺ had been standing at his door, he said that had he only known, he would have made his recitation even more beautiful for him, that he would have offered it for the Prophet ﷺ alone. But there was a wisdom in the Prophet's silence. On another night, Buraydah (may Allah be pleased with him) saw the Prophet ﷺ standing at the door of the mosque, listening to a man inside who was praying and reciting aloud in that beautiful, flowing voice. The Prophet ﷺ turned to him. Buraydah, he asked, do you think this man is showing off? Do you think he is doing this because of me? Buraydah answered that Allah and His Messenger knew best. And the Prophet ﷺ said, no, rather he is a believer who turns constantly to Allah. Then he said the words that would be remembered: he has been given one of the beautiful voices of the family of David.

This is the highest kind of praise. David, the Prophet, was given the Psalms and a voice so beautiful that the mountains and the birds would glorify Allah along with him. To say of Abu Musa that he had a portion of that gift, but given to him with the Qur'an, was to say that his recitation carried something of heaven in it. And

the Prophet ﷺ was, in effect, declaring him free of the disease that can ruin a reciter: showing off. This man, the Prophet ﷺ was saying, does not recite for people. He recites for Allah.

That night, not knowing he was heard, Abu Musa was making a supplication as he prayed. He asked Allah by bearing witness that He is the One, the Self-Sufficient, who neither begets nor is begotten, with nothing comparable to Him. He was praying with the words of the surah the Prophet ﷺ loved:

Say, 'He is God the One, God the eternal. He begot no one nor was He begotten. No one is comparable to Him.'

QUR'AN 112:1-4

The Prophet ﷺ swore that this man had asked Allah by a name such that, when Allah is asked by it, He answers. And when Buraydah asked permission to go and tell Abu Musa the good news, the Prophet ﷺ allowed it, and Abu Musa told Buraydah he would remain his friend forever for bringing it.

One companion who lived alongside him said he had never heard any instrument ever made, no flute, no drum, sweeter than the voice of Abu Musa, and that when he led them in prayer they would secretly hope he would recite the longest surahs, just to keep listening. This was the man the companions wished they could pray behind again and again.

The man of the Qur'an in war and in office

Abu Musa was far more than a beautiful voice. He fought in the Prophet's campaigns. In the fighting after Hunayn, his own brother Abu Amir was struck by an arrow. As he lay dying, Abu Amir asked Abu Musa to carry his greeting to the Prophet ﷺ and to ask the Prophet to seek forgiveness for him. When Abu Musa

delivered the message, the Prophet ﷺ rose, made wudu, and raised his hands so high in supplication that the whiteness of his underarms showed, asking Allah to forgive Abu Amir and to place him above much of His creation. Then Abu Musa seized the moment and asked for himself too. And the Prophet ﷺ prayed for him by name: O Allah, forgive Abdullah ibn Qays his sins, and admit him on the Day of Resurrection to a noble place. To have the Prophet ﷺ ask forgiveness for you by name, by your own name, is a treasure beyond reckoning.

He was also a man of knowledge, which is rarer to combine with the gift of recitation than we might think. He was a hafiz of the entire Qur'an at a time when that was uncommon, one of those who recited the Book back to the Prophet ﷺ himself. And he became a faqih, a jurist, and a judge. When Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) was asked about the companions, he said Abu Musa had been thoroughly immersed in knowledge. The histories list him among the small handful of companions who were the judges and the muftis of that generation.

When he was sent out as a governor, first over Basra and later Kufa, he carried the Qur'an into office with him. His habit in every city was the same: after the noon prayer he would ask, is there anyone here who wants to learn the Qur'an? And he would teach until the afternoon prayer, and if people remained, until sunset. He was not content to be admired for his recitation; he gave it away. The governor of Basra, teaching the Book to whoever would come. Umar, who normally moved his governors after a single year for fear that power would corrupt them, made an exception and left Abu Musa in Basra for four, such was his trust in the man. And when Abu Musa finally left that post, he left with six hundred dirhams to his name. He had governed a province for four years and come out of it poor.

This was the man whose life was so saturated with the Qur'an that when he travelled, Mu'adh ibn Jabal once asked him how he managed his recitation on the road. Abu Musa answered that he recited standing, sitting, and even while riding, sometimes a little at a time and sometimes a great deal, but always reciting. He never put the Book down. He used to narrate the Prophet's warning that the Qur'an slips away from a person faster than a camel escapes its rope if it is not renewed, that one must keep refreshing one's covenant with it. He lived that warning. The Prophet's parting advice to him, when he sent him back to govern Yemen, was simply: keep teaching the people the Qur'an. The man embodied the saying that the best of people are those who learn the Qur'an and then teach it.

There was a verse the Prophet ﷺ once applied to Abu Musa's people, the warning to the believers that if any turned back from their faith, Allah would replace them with a people whom He loves and who love Him:

You who believe, if any of you go back on your faith, God will soon replace you with people He loves and who love Him, people who are humble towards the believers, hard on the disbelievers, and who strive in God's way without fearing anyone's reproach. Such is God's favour. He grants it to whoever He will. God has endless bounty and knowledge.

QUR'AN 5:54

The Prophet ﷺ turned to Abu Musa and said, these are your people. It was a promise woven into the heart of his tribe: that the gift of faith, if it is held and lived, is exactly the love Allah describes here.

Modesty, charity, and a heart kept clean

The companions remembered Abu Musa for his modesty as much as his voice. He used to wear extra layers of plain, coarse clothing out of care that nothing of his body be exposed, and the simplicity of his dress reflected the simplicity of the life he had chosen near the Prophet ﷺ. He once told his son that if he could have seen them in those early days, walking with the Prophet ﷺ when the rain caught them and the smell of their worn wool rose around them, he would have understood the hardship they lived in to stay close to a man who chose poverty over the life of a king.

It was Abu Musa who carried to us the Prophet's words: O Abdullah ibn Qays, shall I tell you of one of the treasures of Paradise? And then the answer, that there is no power and no strength except with Allah. He was an advocate for the poor and the indebted, arguing their case before Allah and before people when he could not relieve them himself. When he visited al-Hasan ibn Ali during an illness, al-Hasan asked whether he had come for some need of his own, and Abu Musa said no, only for the sake of Allah, to visit a sick brother. And then he narrated the Prophet's promise that no believer visits another except that seventy thousand angels send blessings upon him until evening, and a garden is prepared for him in Paradise.

He was constant in fasting, too. The story is told that he was once on a boat when a voice called out over the water, seven times, with glad tidings: that whoever bears the thirst of fasting on a hot day, Allah will quench his thirst on the Day people are most desperate for water. From that day, Abu Musa said, he never again neglected to fast on a hot day. Imam adh-Dhahabi summed up the man's life by saying that leadership never changed him and the world never deluded him: he combined

knowledge with action and struggle, and he kept his heart free of ill will toward anyone. That last quality, salamat al-sadr, the clean and untroubled heart, would matter most at the end of his life.

For Abu Musa lived long enough to see the fitnah, the civil strife that tore at the ummah after the rightly guided years. He narrated many of the Prophet's warnings about those trials: that whoever raises a weapon against the believers is not of them, that the best of Muslims is the one from whose tongue and hand other Muslims are safe, that the believers are to one another like a single building whose parts hold each other up. He said that they never truly understood the warning against pointing even an arrowhead at a brother until they lived to see people deliberately firing arrows at one another. He hated that strife and refused to fight against his brothers. Later, when Mu'awiyah pressed him to take office again, he declined, asking simply what he would say to his Lord when he was returned to Him. He had no appetite left for power.

When the end came, he was fainting in and out, his head in the lap of his wife. He used his last clarity not to speak of himself but to warn her gently against wailing, against tearing clothes or shaving the head in grief, the things the Prophet ﷺ had forbidden. He died at sixty-three, the same age as the Prophet ﷺ, and left behind hundreds of narrations, most of them carried on by his own children. The companions had asked Allah to let them hear his voice again in Paradise. We can ask for the same.

What Abu Musa's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read about a man with a voice like that and conclude that his story has nothing to do with us. Most of us cannot recite the way he did. But the gift was never really the point, and to stop

at admiring it would be to miss what his life is asking of our own iman.

Look again at the night the Prophet ﷺ stood at his door. Abu Musa did not know anyone was listening. He recited that beautifully into an empty night, for an audience of One. And when he learned, afterward, that the Prophet ﷺ had heard him, his instinct was to wish he had made it even better, not because he was caught, but because he loved the listener. That is the whole secret of the man. The Prophet ﷺ declared him free of showing off precisely because Abu Musa was not performing for people; he was pouring out his heart to Allah whether anyone heard or not. This is the quality to take, and it is a quality every one of us can have, however ordinary our gifts: to do the deed for Allah alone, the same in private as in public, content that He has heard it even if no human being ever will. Ask yourself how much of your worship would survive if no one were watching. His survived completely, because none of it had ever been for them.

See, too, how he never put the Book down. Standing, sitting, riding, in poverty, in office, in war, the Qur'an was always on his tongue, and he never stopped teaching it to anyone who would learn. He understood that faith is not held by a single act of belief but by a covenant renewed daily, or else it slips away like an untied camel. Your own iman is the same. It will not hold itself. It asks to be refreshed every day, in your prayer, in your recitation, in the small returning to Allah that you make when the world pulls you elsewhere. And it asks to be given away. You may not be a hafiz, but there is someone near you who cannot yet read a line of the Book, and Abu Musa, a great companion and a governor, was never too important to sit down after the noon prayer and teach them. Neither are we.

And there is his clean heart at the end, the refusal to lift a weapon against his brothers, the choice to keep his hands empty of strife so that he could face his Lord with nothing on his back. In an age as quick to anger and division as ours, that is no small thing. He asks us whether we are willing to be, as the Prophet ﷺ described the best of believers, people from whose tongue and hand others are safe. The concrete good is within reach today: guard your tongue about an absent brother, visit someone who is sick for no reason but Allah, give quietly to someone in debt, recite a portion of the Book tonight for no ears but His. None of it requires a beautiful voice. All of it requires a heart turned toward Allah.

He spent his life carrying the Qur'an, and the Qur'an carried him: to the rank of two migrations, to the prayer of the Prophet ﷺ for forgiveness by name, to a place the companions hoped to find again in the Gardens. May Allah be pleased with Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, soften our hearts toward His Book as He softened theirs, make our worship sincere for Him alone, and let us hear that voice reciting in Paradise.

This chapter follows the account of Abu Musa al-Ash'ari (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (112:1-4, 5:54). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abu Huraira

The Preserver of Hadith

Open almost any book of the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and at some point your eye will fall on the same three words: "from Abu Huraira." From Abu Huraira you learn how to make your ablution. From Abu Huraira you learn the rules of fasting. From Abu Huraira come the warnings about the trials of the end of time, and from him come the gentlest sayings about mercy, about cats, about a mother's right over her son. No human being in history narrated more from the Prophet ﷺ than this one man. And yet, of all the famous Companions, he may be the one the average Muslim knows least as a person.

That is the strange thing about Abu Huraira (may Allah be pleased with him). We hear his name a thousand times and never stop to meet him. So let us meet him. Behind the most prolific narrator of the words of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ is a poor orphaned shepherd, a man who tied stones to his stomach against hunger, who loved his mother to the point that he would not marry until she died, and who, for four short years, refused to leave the side of the Prophet ﷺ.

The boy from a tribe with no good in it

He came from Daws, a tribe in Yemen famous for all the wrong reasons. They were known for drinking and gambling and every kind of recklessness. A man of that very tribe, Tufayl al-Dawsi,

had once gone to the Prophet ﷺ, despaired of his people, and asked him to pray against them. "There is no good in Daws," he said. But the Prophet ﷺ raised his hands and prayed the opposite of a curse: "O Allah, guide Daws, and bring them to me."

No one in history brought more people to the Prophet ﷺ than this orphan boy from that tribe with no good in it. When he finally stood before the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and was asked where he was from, he answered, "From Daws." And the Prophet ﷺ said, "I did not think there was any good in anyone from Daws." But here he was. The boy almost lost to a prayer of despair became the answer to a prayer of mercy.

His father was Umayr; his mother was Maymunah bint Sabih, and her name, fittingly, means the blessed one. She will matter greatly to this story. Before Islam he had carried an ugly name, the slave of the sun, and even an unkind nickname, the kind the Arabs would pin on a person whether he liked it or not. The Prophet ﷺ changed both. He hated bad nicknames and used to say, give people names they love, and call people by the names dearest to them. He gave this young man the name Abd al-Rahman, the servant of the Most Merciful.

But the name everyone remembers came from somewhere tender. He was a shepherd, an orphan tending his family's sheep, and out in the fields he kept a kitten with him, slipping it into his sleeve and playing with it while he watched the flock. And so the Prophet ﷺ, in affection, called him Abu Huraira, the father of the little kitten. He loved that name, because the Prophet ﷺ had given it to him. When the Prophet ﷺ gave a man a nickname out of affection, it became the dearest name he owned.

The mother at the door

He reached Madinah late, only about four years before the Prophet ﷺ would pass from this world. He remembered the very morning he arrived: the Prophet ﷺ had set out for Khaybar, and Abu Huraira prayed Fajr behind the Companion left in charge, who recited Surah Maryam in the first unit and Surat al-Mutaffifin in the second. He remembered the two chapters of his first prayer in the city. That is the first glimpse of the memory that would one day astonish the entire ummah.

He came with almost nothing. A single servant fled from him along the way, and so it was just Abu Huraira and his mother, an old blind woman who followed her son wherever he went without fully understanding why they had moved. He settled her near Dhul-Hulayfah and attached himself to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

And then came the wound that he never hid. When he told his mother that he had embraced Islam and would devote himself to the Prophet ﷺ, she did not just refuse. She cursed him, and the religion, and said things about the man he loved most that he could not bear to repeat. Abu Huraira went to the Prophet ﷺ in tears. "O Messenger of Allah, I keep calling my mother to Islam and she refuses, and today she said about you what I hate to hear." Notice the fear in him. This was Madinah, late in the life of the Prophet ﷺ, when he held authority over the whole city. He could have asked for his mother to be silenced or shamed. He asked for none of that. His fear was for her, for what would become of her in the next life if she died this way.

The Prophet ﷺ raised his hands. "O Allah, guide the mother of Abu Huraira." He said it again, and a third time. And Abu Huraira walked home carrying the glad tidings of that dua, because he had already seen what the prayers of the Prophet ﷺ could do.

He reached the house and found the door shut and water running beneath it. As he moved to open it, his mother called out from inside, "Stay where you are, Abu Huraira." She finished washing, dressed, covered her head, and opened the door. And the first words out of her mouth were the testimony of faith: there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His servant and messenger. He had come the first time weeping in grief. Now he ran back to the Prophet ﷺ weeping with joy. "O Messenger of Allah, glad tidings. Allah has answered your prayer. Allah has guided the mother of Abu Huraira."

He was not finished. He knew the power of that dua now. "O Messenger of Allah, ask Allah to make me and my mother beloved to His believing servants, and to make them beloved to us." The Prophet ﷺ raised his hands again. And Abu Huraira would later say that no believer was ever born who saw him or heard of him except that he loved him. Years later, when the ummah split into factions and Companion stood against Companion in grief and confusion, Abu Huraira was loved by every side. The dua had held.

After that he had a daily habit with his mother. Every time he left the house he would stand at her door and say, "Peace be upon you, my dear mother, and the mercy of Allah and His blessings," and she would return it, and he would say, "May Allah have mercy on you as you raised me when I was small," and she would answer, "And may Allah have mercy on you, my son, as you have honored me in my old age." He did it leaving and he did it returning. He did not perform the Hajj and he did not marry until she died, because he would not leave her alone. It is no accident that the most famous hadith about a mother's right, the one where the Prophet ﷺ named the mother three times before the

father, comes to us through Abu Huraira. He lived it before he narrated it.

The man who tied stones to his stomach

There was a second life running alongside the first, and it is the one he is more famous for. Abu Huraira became the leader of the people of the Suffah, the homeless migrants who slept on a raised platform in the Prophet's mosque. They had no tribe in the city, no settled work, no money. The Prophet ﷺ would stand and urge the Companions: each of you take one of the people of the Suffah home, and Allah will stretch the food of one to feed two. When a gift arrived, the first thing he did was call for them. He refused to let the poorest of his community become invisible.

Abu Huraira was among them, and he hid his hunger out of dignity. He used to bind a stone over his stomach against the emptiness. He would not ask anyone for food; he was too proud to say he was starving. Instead he would stop a man and ask him to explain a verse of the Qur'an, a verse whose meaning he already knew, hoping the man would notice his face and offer him something to eat. He remembered fainting outside the door of Aishah from pure hunger, and a passerby thinking he had lost his mind. "I am not mad," he would say. "It is hunger."

His most famous account of those days carries no bitterness, only honesty about his own heart. He had been pressing his stomach to the ground against the hunger when he sat by the path the Prophet ﷺ would take. Abu Bakr passed, and Abu Huraira asked him about a verse, hoping for an invitation; Abu Bakr explained it and walked on. Umar passed, and the same. Then the Prophet ﷺ came out, looked at his face, and knew, because he himself was the hungriest of all of them. "O Abu Hirr," he said, the father of the grown cat, joking with him to

lighten the moment. He took him into the house, where someone had gifted a pitcher of milk. And then the Prophet ﷺ said, "Go and call all the people of the Suffah."

Abu Huraira admitted it plainly: his heart sank. He was starving, he felt he had more right to that milk than anyone, and now it would be shared until nothing was left. But he obeyed and brought them in. The Prophet ﷺ handed him the pitcher: give it to them. One by one they drank, and each time Abu Huraira hoped to hear "now your turn," and each time the Prophet ﷺ said, "now the next." When every one of them had drunk their fill, the Prophet ﷺ looked at the pitcher, still not empty, and said, "Abu Huraira, it is just you and me now." He told him to drink, and Abu Huraira drank, and was told to drink again, and again, until he said, "By the One who sent you with the truth, I have no more room." Only then did the Prophet ﷺ take the pitcher, praise Allah, and drink the last of it himself.

When he told Umar about that day, that he had hoped to be noticed and was not, Umar was crushed with regret. "By Allah," he said, "had I known and fed you that day, it would have been dearer to me than a herd of red camels," the most prized wealth they had. He wished he had earned the reward that, on that day, only the Prophet ﷺ had been given the eyes to see.

How one man held four years in his heart

The question pressed in on him even in his own lifetime, and it presses still: how could one man, with only four years beside the Prophet ﷺ, carry more of his words than Companions who had walked with him for twenty? People said it openly. Abu Huraira narrates too much. He answered without defensiveness. While others came to the Prophet ﷺ at the start of the day and the end of it and went home to their families and their fields and their

trade, he never left. He stayed at the cost of his own stomach. Ubayy ibn Ka'b said Abu Huraira would shadow the Prophet ﷺ when none of them would, and would ask him what none of them dared to ask. Talhah said simply, "We do not doubt anything he narrates," because Abu Huraira heard what they did not hear; he was a shadow to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

Two gifts sealed it. Three young Companions were once waiting by the Prophet's door, remembering Allah and making dua, when he came out and sat with them and told them to continue while he said "amin" to their prayers. His two companions made their requests, and then Abu Huraira, last and shrewdest, prayed, "O Allah, I ask You for all that my two companions asked, and for knowledge that I will never forget." The Prophet ﷺ said "amin." Some duas have a window, and he climbed through it.

And once he complained to the Prophet ﷺ that he heard so much and feared forgetting it. The Prophet ﷺ told him to spread out his cloak, and made a motion as if pouring something into it, and told him to gather it back to his chest. After that, Abu Huraira said, he never forgot a single letter of what he heard.

Decades later, the governor of Madinah set out to test him. He sat Abu Huraira down and had scribes hidden behind a curtain write every word as he narrated from dawn to night: I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say, I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say. A full year later the governor brought Abu Huraira back and asked him to narrate it all again, and the scribes found he had not changed a word, nor even the order. Imam ash-Shafi'i would later say he had the greatest memory of this ummah in his time, and in one narration, until the Day of Judgment. His gathering in the Prophet's mosque was the largest of all: he prayed Fajr, then sat from the forenoon until noon, pouring out everything he had

heard, and people crowded around to receive the Prophet ﷺ through him.

Five fingers, and a warning he could not give

He did not merely memorize words; he absorbed the way the Prophet ﷺ taught. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ once asked, "Who will take these words and act on them, or teach those who will?" Abu Huraira said at once, "I will, O Messenger of Allah." So the Prophet ﷺ took his hand and folded down one finger with each counsel. Leave what Allah has forbidden, and you will be the most devoted of worshippers. Be content with what Allah has allotted you, and you will be the richest of people. Be good to your neighbor, and you will be a true believer. Love for people what you love for yourself, and you will be a true Muslim. And do not laugh too much, for too much laughter kills the heart. Five things, five fingers, a whole religion of character pressed into a single grip.

He took that contentment into his own bones. When his mother died he married a woman named Busra bint Ghazwan, and his story circled back on itself: she had been wealthy, and he had once been her shepherd, just as the Prophet ﷺ had married Khadijah after working her caravan. After his prayers Abu Huraira would marvel aloud, who blessed Abu Huraira like this, who lifted him from that hardship to this ease, naming the favor of Allah on his tongue. A visitor who stayed seven days in his home found the most generous of hosts, and a household that split the night into thirds for prayer: Abu Huraira prayed a third and woke his wife, who prayed a third and woke their daughter, so that in that house someone was standing before Allah through the whole of the night.

His was a frugal and watchful soul. Every morning he would say, "The night has gone, the day has come, and the people of Pharaoh are exposed to the Fire," and every evening the reverse, seeking refuge in Allah from the punishment. He fought in the great battles, at Yamamah and at Yarmouk. When Umar appointed him governor of Bahrain and later came to inspect him, he found the people praising his justice but noticed Abu Huraira had saved a little money; when Abu Huraira explained it was only the thrift of a man who had once starved, he still gave it all to the treasury rather than carry any suspicion. When Umar later wished to appoint him again, he refused, saying he would not risk his honor, his wealth, or his back, nor risk speaking without knowledge or judging without gentleness. He wanted to work with his own hands. As governor of Madinah he would carry firewood on his own back through the market, calling out in jest, "Make way for the governor," so the people would laugh.

And he never lost the gentleness that had named him. He played hide and seek with the children of Madinah, and when they caught him he would lie still as if dead, and the only way to wake him was to recite Qur'an over him, at which he would sit up and say, "There is no god but Allah." He was teaching them to love the Book of Allah inside a children's game.

But there was one thing he could not say. When the fitna broke out and the youth of the troublemakers needled him, accusing him of inventing words of the Prophet ﷺ, he said, "If I told you everything I know, you would throw me into a ditch and kill me." He meant the hadiths describing the very people of trial standing in front of him. He refused to take a side in the bloodshed; he withdrew from it entirely. And there is a scene from those days that speaks straight to our own. He went into the marketplace and began calling out, "Everyone to the mosque, the inheritance

of the Prophet ﷺ is being distributed." The people rushed from their trade to the mosque, and found only circles of Qur'an and hadith and fiqh. "Are you mocking us?" they asked. "No," he said. "That is the inheritance of the prophets." The scholars note that when fitna grows, the circles of knowledge shrink, as people trade learning for drama, and Abu Huraira was trying to turn his city back.

He passed away about sixty years after the Prophet ﷺ. When he was dying and people kept questioning him about the trials to come, he looked up at last and smiled and said, "O Allah, I love to meet You, so love to meet me." He asked them not to make a scene at his grave, and to carry him quickly, for he had heard the Prophet ﷺ say that the righteous soul, borne on the shoulders, cries, "Hurry me forward," eager to reach his Lord.

What Abu Huraira's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to admire Abu Huraira from a safe distance, to be impressed by the memory and leave it there. That would miss what his life is actually asking of us.

He gave up everything he needed in order to stay near the source of guidance. He had no money, no tribe in the city, no food in his stomach, and he could have spent those four years earning a living and securing himself. Instead he tied a stone to his hunger and refused to miss a single word of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Out of that choice came the knowledge that teaches you and me how to pray and fast and live, fourteen centuries later. Ask yourself honestly what you are willing to go without in order to stay close to the words of the Prophet ﷺ. Most of us are full and still distant. He was starving and would not leave. There is a lesson in that about where we let our hunger point.

He feared for his mother more than he feared for himself, and he wanted her saved more than he wanted to be vindicated. When she insulted the one he loved most, he did not lash out; he wept and begged for her guidance. And the whole of it turned on a dua. He had watched the prayer of the Prophet ﷺ reach into a hopeless tribe, into a cursing mother, and change everything, and so he believed in dua the way you believe in something you have seen with your own eyes. That is the faith his life calls you to: to trust that Allah hears, to lift your hands for the people you have given up on, the parent who will not soften, the heart that seems sealed, and to keep lifting them. Nothing in his story was won by force. Almost all of it was won by a sincere hand raised to the sky.

And he hid his hunger out of dignity, and gave away the milk he was dying for because the Prophet ﷺ commanded it, and the pitcher did not run dry. That is the quiet promise threaded through his whole life: what you surrender for the sake of Allah, He does not let go to waste. He held to contentment whether he was licking the last of the butter from a dish or marveling at the wealth Allah later gave him, because his peace was never in the amount. It was in his Lord. When you are asked to give what you feel you cannot spare, his life asks whether you trust that the One who commanded the giving can also fill the cup again.

So take one thing from him into an ordinary day. Hold onto the words of the Prophet ﷺ as if they were food, and learn one of them well enough to live it. Raise your hands for someone you have stopped expecting to change. Give something for Allah that costs you, and trust Him with what is left. That is how the father of the kitten lived, in love, in dignity, in trust, and it is a way still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Abu Huraira, make us among those who love him as the Prophet ﷺ

prayed we would, and join us to him in the gathering where the Sunnah is recited from dawn until noon and never forgotten.

This chapter follows the account of Abu Huraira (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2:255). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Tufayl ibn Amr al-Dawsi

The Hidden Legend

There is a kind of greatness that the world celebrates, and there is a kind it forgets. Tufayl ibn Amr (may Allah be pleased with him) is one of the forgotten ones, and that is the strange and beautiful thing about him. Most people who know his name know it only as a footnote in someone else's story. He was the man who called Abu Hurayrah to Islam, and Abu Hurayrah went on to narrate more hadith of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ than anyone in history. So when you reach for the words of the Prophet ﷺ on an ordinary day, when a hadith comes to your lips or settles in your heart, there is a thread that runs back, quietly, to a man you have probably never thought about.

It is one thing to have noted influence. It is another to have noble impact. Tufayl had impact most of us cannot imagine, and almost no fame to go with it. His life is a lesson, before it is told, in where true worth is kept, and Who keeps it.

The chief of a careless tribe

He was the chief of a tribe called Daws, a tribe from Najran, which in that time was counted as part of Yemen. It sat in a region known for its greenery and its wealth, a green and prosperous place, and Daws was an affluent tribe. But it was not famous for anything noble. It was famous for partying, for drinking, for dancing, for gambling, for usury. It was famous for

all the wrong things, for carelessness and a certain reckless ease that comes to people who have everything and fear nothing.

The Prophet ﷺ once said, in an authentic narration, that the Hour would not be established until the women of Daws would once again circle Dhul-Khalasah, the idol of that people, in the old lewd festivals their ancestors had kept. When corruption that had become unfamiliar to a place returns to it, when idols rise again where they had once fallen, the wise person does not shrug. He remembers the Hour. Humanity dips, and recovers, and dips again, and no one knows when the final descent will come.

Into this tribe, as its chief, Tufayl was born with rare gifts. He was a man of great presence, great power, and great poetry, exceedingly intelligent and eloquent, and he held enormous sway over people. Each year he travelled to the pilgrimage of the days of ignorance, and often to Makkah itself, where he traded in the great market and recited his poetry while people gathered to listen. He was exactly the sort of man the leaders of Quraysh could not afford to lose to the new message, because if Tufayl believed, an alliance would break, a powerful protector might appear, and the most eloquent of tongues might begin to speak for Islam.

Cotton in his ears

So Quraysh had a plan. When the chiefs of the neighbouring tribes came for the pilgrimage, the powerful men of Makkah would take them aside before they could hear the Prophet ﷺ, and fill their ears with warnings instead. Tufayl arrived from Najran and was surprised to find Abu Lahab himself waiting with a whole reception ready, which tells you how seriously they took him. They pulled him close and chose, for him, the argument they knew would land. Tufayl loved his tribe. He loved his people

gathered, his families intact. So they told him this man Muhammad ﷺ was a sorcerer, that his words were a spell that tore households apart, that turned a husband against his wife and a brother against his brother and a father against his son. They said, he will do to you and your people what he has done to us.

They kept at him until the fear took hold. Tufayl said, later, that they would not stop until he resolved he would not enter the sacred precinct at all unless his ears were plugged. He stuffed his ears with cotton, as much as he could pack in, and went to perform his circuits hoping he would not so much as cross paths with this man, and that if he did, the sorcery could not reach him.

But Allah had decided otherwise. The Prophet ﷺ was standing in prayer near the Kaaba, reciting. Tufayl kept his distance, and the cotton in his ears, but his own intelligence began to embarrass him. He was a poet, a man who could tell sense from nonsense, good speech from bad. What kind of man plugs his ears against words he is too afraid to judge? He said, Allah refused except that I should hear some of it. A few phrases reached him through the cotton, and they were beautiful. So he pulled the cotton out and told himself that if this man spoke guidance he would take it, and if he spoke foolishness he would have the sense to throw it away.

He listened. He said he had never heard anything more beautiful. And then he noticed something else. Sorcerers, in his experience, had a look about them, an aura that unsettled you. This man had none of it. The Prophet ﷺ stood calm and unassuming, at peace, with beautiful manners and a humble bearing, minding his own affair, simply reciting the words of his Lord. Tufayl followed him home, knocked, and was let in. He introduced himself with disarming honesty. He said, you are the

one the people are calling a sorcerer. The Prophet ﷺ smiled and said, yes. Tufayl asked him what it was he taught, what these words were. The Prophet ﷺ recited to him from the Qur'an, in one narration from the very verses by which a soul seeks refuge in Allah from the things he had been told to fear.

Tufayl was completely overcome. He said, right there, I became Muslim. He asked how to enter this religion, and the Prophet ﷺ taught him the testimony of faith. Tufayl put out his hand, took the hand of the Prophet ﷺ, and gave his pledge. In a single afternoon, a man went from refusing even to hear, to belief.

The light between his eyes

Tufayl assumed his people would follow him the moment he returned. He had that kind of standing among them. So he offered the Prophet ﷺ everything: come back with me to Daws, in Najran, and my tribe will protect you and be your allies against all who surround you. But the Prophet ﷺ asked him gently whether he truly had anyone behind him, whether he was sure of the protection he was promising, this early, before the worst persecution had even begun. Tufayl thought about it honestly and admitted that he did not know. So he said, then let me go back and call them, and perhaps Allah will guide them. And he asked the Prophet ﷺ for something: pray to Allah to give me a sign, a miracle by which I can support this call.

He told no one in Makkah and stirred no commotion. He travelled home alone until he reached the valley of his people, where his elderly father, his wife, and his small children were waiting. And as he came down toward them, Allah placed a light between his eyes, shining from his face. This was the sign the Prophet ﷺ had asked for, and it became his nickname forever: Dhun-Nur, the possessor of light.

But even in that moment, Tufayl was thinking of his people. He worried they would see the light on his face and read it backwards, as a punishment fallen on him for leaving their religion, a warning made of him rather than a sign for him. So he prayed, O Allah, put it somewhere other than my face. The light moved. It travelled to the top of his staff, and he walked into the tribe of Daws holding a beam of light above him like a hanging lamp. It was the kind of miracle Allah grants to the righteous, often echoing the miracles He had given the prophets before, a clear proof carried in the hand.

His father came to him first. Tufayl, wanting to startle him into listening, said, I am not from you and you are not from me. The old man, who loved his son, asked why. Tufayl said, I have become Muslim and followed the religion of Muhammad ﷺ. His father answered simply, then my religion is your religion, and embraced Islam at once. His mother came, saw the light, asked, and believed. He went to his wife and said the same hard words, and when she understood, she asked only whether the idol Dhul-Khalasah would harm them for leaving it. He swore by Allah it would not. She bathed and returned and believed. His father, his mother, his wife, and his small children: all Muslim.

So far it was going exactly as he had hoped.

A people who would not listen

Then he called the rest of Daws, and they refused him. All of them, but for a handful, and in truth almost no one beyond a single man, a poor young orphan shepherd named Abu Hurayrah. Everyone else turned away. And here is the heart of why. It was not that the chief lacked a compelling argument. It was that they were afraid of what the religion would ask of them. The partying, the drinking, the usury, all the things they loved. They could see

clearly that this was an ethical religion, one that would demand they change as a people, and they were not willing.

Tufayl kept trying. He grew frustrated. He began to lean on his rank, reminding them of his standing, his nobility, his place among them: you know me, you know who I am, and I am telling you this man is a prophet and this is the truth. They would not move. And so Tufayl came back to the Prophet ﷺ with almost nothing to show, his elderly parents, his wife, and one little orphan boy, and he was exhausted by the rejection. He said to the Prophet ﷺ, Daws has rebelled and refused. They are overcome by their adultery and their usury. They cannot see the truth through their own practices. And then he said the thing a despairing leader says: O Messenger of Allah, pray to Allah against them. Pray that He destroy Daws.

Watch what the Prophet ﷺ did. He raised his hands, and Tufayl was ready for the curse, ready for his own people to be wiped out for how they had treated the call. And the Prophet ﷺ said: O Allah, guide Daws and bring them. O Allah, guide Daws and bring them. The mercy of the Prophet ﷺ toward those people was greater than the mercy of their own chief. Then he turned to Tufayl and told him to go back, and this time to be gentle. Call them with leniency, with softness.

It was Tufayl himself who later carried the words the Prophet ﷺ taught in that lesson, that Allah is gentle and loves gentleness, and that Allah gives through gentleness what He does not give through harshness. The first time, Tufayl had gone with a light in his hand and his authority in his voice, and he had broken people down. Now he was sent back with nothing miraculous at all, only patience and a soft tongue.

The fruit of patience

It did not happen quickly. We all want our calling to succeed in an afternoon. It took Tufayl years. He went home and called them gently and stayed among them, going back and forth, with Abu Hurayrah calling beside him, while he visited the Prophet ﷺ in Madinah from time to time. And at the end of all that patient labour, around eighty or ninety families of Daws embraced Islam and migrated with their chief to the Prophet ﷺ.

That was the answer to the prayer: O Allah, guide Daws and bring them. To grasp the weight of it, you have to remember what migration meant then. People did not simply pick up their lives and move. The trade routes were seasonal, and to relocate was to risk settling in what might become hostile ground, in an age when a single killing could ignite a war lasting forty years. For eighty or ninety families to leave their green and wealthy valley, follow their chief to a strange city, and accept the hardships of being migrants, was a profound act of faith.

Among those who came was a man whose story Tufayl never forgot. Madinah was hard on newcomers. Its water and climate made migrants sick, the way an unfamiliar land can lay a traveller low for days. This man fell ill, and a heavy sadness overtook him, and in his distress he took a sharp stone and cut off the tips of his own fingers, and bled until he died. Later Tufayl saw him in a dream, dressed in the fine clothes of Paradise, but with his hands covered. Tufayl asked what his Lord had done with him. The man said, He forgave me because of my migration to the Prophet ﷺ. And the hands? He said, I was told, we will not repair for you what you yourself destroyed. Tufayl brought the dream to the Prophet ﷺ, who raised his hands and prayed, O Allah, and for his hands, forgive him.

It is a narration heavy with both hope and warning. The hope is that even after the gravest of sins a person is not cast out of the faith, and is still prayed for, and may still be forgiven. The warning is plain: the body is a trust, and a person answers for what he does to the trust Allah gave him. Do not harm what your Lord has entrusted to you.

The dream, and the bird

Tufayl and his people stayed with the Prophet ﷺ until the conquest of Makkah. When that day came, Tufayl asked for a particular honour: to be the one to destroy the idol of Amr ibn Humamah, a great copper idol its owner had paraded before the elite of Makkah. The people had long believed that whoever harmed the idol would be struck with disease and ruin. Tufayl went to it and kindled a fire inside its belly until it was destroyed from within, and as it burned he recited a verse of his own: that the idol was no god of theirs, that the people had come before it, and that he was the one who had set fire to its heart. The superstition died with the idol.

He stayed with the Prophet ﷺ until the Prophet ﷺ passed away. And here his story, which usually ends at Abu Hurayrah, keeps going. Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) appointed Tufayl among the leaders sent against Musaylimah, the false prophet who had claimed prophethood, fought the Muslims, and was known for his brutality. So the great chief, the famous poet, went now simply as a warrior, with his eldest son beside him.

On the road to the battle of Yamamah, Tufayl woke and told the people around him of a strange dream. He had seen his own head shaved or cut, and a bird coming out of his mouth, and the bird then entering the body of a woman, and his son searching for him and unable to find him. No one could interpret it, so Tufayl

interpreted it himself. My head being cut, he said, is my death; I will be martyred in this battle. The bird is my soul, for the Prophet ﷺ told us that the souls of the martyrs are in the bodies of birds suspended near the Throne of the Most Merciful, that feed from the rivers of Paradise and rest in lamps of light. The woman whose body the bird entered is the earth, for I will be buried in it and returned to it as I first came from it. And my son searching for me, he said, means he will not be granted martyrdom alongside me in this battle; he will be left looking for me when it is over.

Imagine the son hearing his own father read the future like that, calmly, on the way to the fight.

The battle of Yamamah was one of the fiercest the early Muslims fought, the battle whose losses would later move them to gather the Qur'an into a single book, because so many who carried it in their hearts were killed there. Tufayl went into it. His son stayed near, the way fathers and sons fought together in those days, calling out and waving across the lines, losing sight of one another and reuniting, again and again, as the fighting grew brutal. Then the son lost him. He found him afterward, martyred on the field, exactly as the dream had foretold. And the son himself lost his right hand in the battle.

Grief took the young man. He could not eat, could not be himself. He had wanted to stand with his father, to fall with him, and instead he had survived, maimed and alone. Then someone said to him the thing that turned his heart: I swear by Allah, there is no one among us who already has a part of himself in Paradise except you. Your hand has gone ahead of you. So go and follow it. They used to call him the son of the possessor of light. He went forward, fighting with one hand, at the battle of Yarmuk, and

there he too was martyred, a martyr and the son of a martyr, joining his father in the company the Prophet ﷺ had described. May Allah be pleased with them both.

What Tufayl's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read this and feel only wonder at the miracles, the light on the staff, the dreams that came true. But the miracles are not the lesson. The lesson is hidden in plain sight, in something the Prophet ﷺ taught and Tufayl lived: the one who calls to good, who guides to it, who makes it possible for another, has a share in every good that follows, as if he had done it himself.

Think about what that means for Tufayl. Not one hadith is narrated from him. Not one from his children. The men who died at Yamamah did not live long enough to teach the traditions. And yet because he was patient, because he went back a second time and called gently and stayed for years until eighty or ninety families came, one poor orphan shepherd from his valley became Abu Hurayrah, who narrated more than five thousand sayings of the Prophet ﷺ and opened a door to the Prophet ﷺ that we would otherwise have no way through at all. Every one of those narrations is written, in part, to Tufayl's account. A man the histories barely mention may have one of the heaviest scales of any companion.

So here is the first thing his life asks of you. You do not need to be celebrated to be heavy with Allah. Many of us look at our small, unremarkable days and quietly despair that we are doing nothing great, that no one will even notice when we are gone. But the value of a deed was never in whether people say your name. Allah records the reward of every good you cause, every soul you point toward Him, every door you open, whether or not a

single human being ever traces it back to you. Do the good and let Allah keep the ledger. He does not lose anything done for His sake. A person who truly believes that will pour himself into quiet, uncounted good, the way Tufayl poured himself into a calling that, on the day he died, looked like it had produced almost nothing.

The second thing his life asks is patience, with the gentleness Allah loves. When Tufayl was rejected, he leaned on his rank and his pride, and people closed against him. When he was sent back with softness, hearts opened, slowly, over years. We are quick to want results and quick to grow harsh when they do not come. We want to win the argument, to shame the doubter, to break the one who disagrees. But the Prophet ﷺ said he was not sent as one who curses; he was sent as a mercy, and Allah gives through gentleness what He never gives through harshness. If there is someone you long to see closer to Allah, a child, a parent, a friend who will not listen, Tufayl's life tells you not to force the door and not to despair when it does not open today. Be gentle. Be patient. Keep calling, softly, for years if that is what it takes, and leave the guidance to the One who guides.

And there is a tenderness here for your own heart. When Tufayl, in his exhaustion, asked for his people to be destroyed, the Prophet ﷺ asked instead that they be guided and brought. The mercy of Allah toward people is greater than our own, even toward those who have hurt us most. So when you make du'a, make it the way the Prophet ﷺ made it. Ask Allah to guide, not to destroy. Ask Him to bring people near, not to cast them out. That is a higher and harder love, and it is the love this religion is built on.

Tufayl ibn Amr stuffed his ears with cotton so he would not hear the truth, and Allah refused to let him remain deaf. He carried a light into a careless valley, and when only a handful believed, he went back and tried again, gently, for as long as it took. He gave the rest of his life to a single calling, then to a battle in which he laid down his life with his eyes open, having already seen his end in a dream and walked toward it without fear. The world forgot him. Allah did not. May Allah be pleased with him, and write us among those who call to good with patience and gentleness, who give for His sake alone what no one will ever see, and who trust that nothing offered to Him is ever lost.

This chapter follows the account of Tufayl ibn Amr al-Dawsi (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The transcript cites the Qur'an only in passing, by reference to the verses of seeking refuge, so no verse is quoted here; the words of the Prophet ﷺ are paraphrased as related in the lecture. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman

The Keeper of the Secret

There was one man in Madinah who walked among the believers carrying a list he could not share. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had entrusted him with the names of the hypocrites, the people whose tongues said one thing while their hearts hid another. Imagine how far a person must stand from hypocrisy before the Messenger of Allah hands him that burden. Imagine walking through a city where you alone, after the Prophet ﷺ himself, know who is true and who is false, and saying nothing, ever, to anyone. The hypocrites felt a quiet dread around him, afraid that one day he might expose them. He never did. He held the secret until the day he died, and the people gave him a name for it: the keeper of the secret of the Messenger of Allah.

His name was Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman (may Allah be pleased with him), and to understand why Allah placed such trust in him, you have to begin not with the secret, but with a man, his father, and a battlefield.

A family that came to Islam from two cities

Even his father's name carries a story. People called him al-Yaman, "the Yemeni," but he was not from Yemen and that was not his name. His name was Husayl. As a young man he had been caught in a brawl among the youth of his tribe and had accidentally killed a man. He fled, traveling until he reached the

city that was then called Yathrib, and there he pledged himself as an ally to a sub-tribe of the Ansar, a clan of Banu Abd al-Ashhal. He told them, in effect, I will serve you and be loyal to you, take me in. Because he had attached himself to a tribe known to trace its roots back to Yemen, the people began calling him al-Yaman. The name stuck, and his son inherited the shadow of it.

This was no ordinary clan. It produced some of the most luminous of the Ansar, and Hudhayfah grew up among them, in the company of the best of the young companions of the Prophet

ﷺ.

The family had an unusual life. Husayl had become a man of some means, with a home in Makkah and a home in Yathrib, traveling between the two cities in a way few people did. So when the message of Islam reached them, it reached a family that was settled in Madinah while still keeping ties to Makkah. They embraced Islam without ever having seen the Prophet ﷺ preach. The first emissary the Prophet ﷺ sent to Madinah carried the message to them, and they believed in him as a Prophet of Allah before they had ever laid eyes on him. Then they waited, with a longing the histories describe, for the day he would arrive among them.

Honour the oath, even to your enemy

When the Prophet ﷺ finally made his way to Madinah, an interesting choice was placed before Hudhayfah and his father. They were both makki and madani, belonging by experience to both worlds. So they were given a choice that almost no one else received: did they wish to be counted among the Muhajirun, the emigrants, or among the Ansar, the helpers? The easier path was obvious. To be Muhajirun meant being a guest, with no one to host and no one to spend on. But they understood the reward in

being hosts, in giving rather than receiving, and Hudhayfah answered, "I am one of the Ansar, O Messenger of Allah." He chose the harder and more generous station, and the Prophet ﷺ accepted it.

There is an episode from the road that tells you everything about the household Hudhayfah came from, and about the man he followed. Around the time of the Prophet's migration, the enemies of Islam were watching the paths between Makkah and Madinah. Abu Jahl intercepted Hudhayfah and his father, not yet knowing they were Muslim, and demanded to know where they were going. They said it was a business trip, which was true, for they were known to travel between the two cities. Abu Jahl pressed them: you are only going to support Muhammad, aren't you? They denied it, and to be released, they swore an oath that they would not go out with the Prophet ﷺ to fight against the Quraysh.

Then the Battle of Badr drew near, and the two men came to the Prophet ﷺ in distress. We took this oath with Abu Jahl, they said, but we want to march out with you. What do we do? Consider who Abu Jahl was. He had boycotted the Prophet ﷺ, plotted to kill him, tortured and killed believers. By every worldly measure, an oath sworn under his coercion was worth nothing. But the Prophet ﷺ told them plainly: honour your oath, and we will seek the help of Allah against them. We are not a people who betray. So Hudhayfah and his father stayed back from Badr, not out of fear, but out of faithfulness to a promise given even to a tyrant. And they waited in Madinah until the news came of the victory Allah had granted at Badr.

The day his father fell

A year later came the Battle of Uhud, and with it the most painful day of Hudhayfah's life. His father, al-Yaman, was now an old man, and the Prophet ﷺ had given him and his friend Thabit ibn Waqsh permission to remain behind with the women, the children, and those unable to fight. But as the battle raged in the distance, the two elderly men looked at one another, and one of them said, in effect, what are we waiting for? We are old, and the only life left to us is barely the time it takes a donkey to quench its thirst. Why die in our beds when we could die alongside the Messenger of Allah and perhaps be granted martyrdom? So the two old men put on their armour and went out to Uhud.

They arrived after the fighting had already begun, in the thick of the chaos, their faces covered by their armour. They charged into the battle from the direction of Madinah, just as the enemy cavalry was striking the Muslims from behind. In the confusion, no one recognised them. The Muslims, assuming these two armoured men coming from that direction were the enemy, turned their swords on al-Yaman. From a distance, Hudhayfah saw his own father, even through the armour, and saw the believers closing in on him. He began to scream as loudly as he could, "It is my father! It is my father!" But his voice was swallowed by the clash of swords and the roar of the battle. By the time he reached him, his father had been killed by the swords of the Muslims, by accident, by the very people he had come to help.

The men who had struck him realised what they had done and were stricken with grief. They wept, swearing they had not known who he was, that they had taken him for one of the enemy. And here Hudhayfah did something that revealed the depth of his faith. He did not rage. He did not demand vengeance. He spoke the words that the Prophet Yusuf (peace

be upon him) had once spoken to the brothers who had wronged him:

but he said, 'You will hear no reproaches today. May God forgive you: He is the Most Merciful of the merciful.'

QUR'AN 12:92

He forgave them on the spot, and kept on forgiving them. The Prophet ﷺ was so moved by this that he ordered Hudhayfah be given the blood-money for his father, a hundred camels, enough at that time to make a man wealthy for life. Hudhayfah took all hundred camels and distributed every one of them to the poor among the Muslims. He had lost his father to a tragic mistake, been honoured with a fortune in compensation, and given the entire fortune away for the sake of Allah. The narrators report that he continued to ask Allah to forgive those companions for their mistake until the day he himself met Allah.

This is why Allah would entrust this man as He did. Here was someone who would not exploit a single situation for himself, who answered the worst grief with forgiveness and generosity. Here was a person of amanah, of trust, of sincerity. And so the Prophet ﷺ would come to treat him unlike any of the others.

The man who feared hypocrisy

The Prophet ﷺ gave Hudhayfah the list of the hypocrites, and gave it to no other human being. But Hudhayfah's protection from hypocrisy ran deeper than a secret entrusted to him. It lived in the way his heart was turned.

Most of the companions, being human, wanted to ask the Prophet ﷺ about the good that was coming, the victories, the gardens of Paradise. Hudhayfah was different. As he himself

said, the people used to ask the Messenger of Allah about the good, but I used to ask him about the evil, out of fear that it would reach me. He wanted to know about the hard times ahead so that he could navigate them, and he wanted to know about the punishment so that he could flee from it. There is a deep wisdom buried in this. The cure for hypocrisy is, in large part, the remembrance of the Fire. The companions who feared the Hellfire most were also the ones who feared hypocrisy most, and Hudhayfah feared both as though the danger were always at his door.

He once described the fitnah, the trials and tribulations, that the Prophet ﷺ had foretold to him. He said, by Allah, I am the most knowledgeable of people concerning every trial that will occur between now and the Day of Judgement. The Prophet ﷺ would speak to the companions about the coming tribulations, and some memorised what they could and some forgot, but Hudhayfah was the one who held it all. The trial he warned of most often was the loss of trust among people, the lifting of amanah from human hearts. He narrated that trustworthiness was first rooted deep in the hearts of men, and then they learned it through the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet ﷺ, and then a time would come when Allah would lift it away: a man would sleep, and the amanah would be taken from his heart, leaving only a faint trace like the mark of a fire. A time would come, he said, when you could scarcely find a single trustworthy person to do business with, when a man would be praised for his intelligence and his appearance and his strength, yet not have in his heart faith equal to a mustard seed. Notice how amanah and iman, trust and faith, share the same root, and in Hudhayfah's telling they rise and fall together. The loss of trust among people is a symptom of the loss of faith.

He hated that loss of trust, and he was, by temperament, a serious man, a straight shooter who pushed the companions and the generation after them to live up to their best selves. When people asked him what hypocrisy was, he gave them the most sobering answer: that you speak of Islam but do not act upon it, that you say what you do not do.

The governor on a small donkey

When the Prophet ﷺ passed away, Hudhayfah's gift became a heavy thing to carry. Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), who knew Hudhayfah's standing, used to watch him at funerals. If Hudhayfah did not come to pray over a man, Umar would hold back from praying too, fearing that man might have been one of the hypocrites. Once, Umar asked him outright, with the question of a man who feared his Lord more than he feared anything else: am I one of them? Did the Prophet ﷺ name me among them? This was Umar, to whom the Prophet ﷺ had promised Paradise, and still he trembled at the thought. Hudhayfah told him, no, but do not ask me about anyone else. Umar then asked about the men he had appointed as governors and leaders, were any of them hypocrites? Hudhayfah named one, and would say no more. And the narration tells us that it was as though Allah opened Umar's heart to the truth, for he quietly dismissed that one man from his post, guided to it without ever being told the name. The success of these companions was never mere worldly brilliance. It was taqwa, and the help of Allah that came with it.

Umar trusted Hudhayfah completely, because the Prophet ﷺ had declared him free of hypocrisy, and so he sent him to govern al-Madain, the former heart of the Persian Empire, the city of the great palace of the Persian king. The people there had lived

under the most pompous of rulers, a king draped in more wealth than the Muslims had ever seen. They gathered to receive their new governor. What came to them was a man riding a donkey so small that his legs nearly dragged on the ground, carrying a loaf of bread and something to dip it in, his clothes patched. They could hardly believe it. This was the new governor of al-Madain. When they offered him anything he wished, eager to win the favour of the new authority, he answered that he only wanted enough food for himself and fodder for his donkey. That was all.

Umar, testing him, summoned him back to Madinah, and waited on the outskirts of the city to watch for his return. When Hudhayfah came back in the same patched clothes, on the same small donkey, having sat upon the treasures of an empire and taken nothing, Umar embraced him and said, you are my brother, and I am yours. That was exactly what he had hoped to see.

Hudhayfah settled in Iraq in his old age. He would travel each Friday to Kufa, no small journey, to teach and guide the young people of the ummah. He was a man of tarbiyah, of nurturing, who would stop a man spreading gossip and remind him that the slanderer does not enter Paradise, who once watched a young man pray so hastily, without settling into each posture, that he told him: you have not prayed, and if you died praying like this you would die upon something other than the way of Muhammad ﷺ. He taught that man, gently and firmly, that even a short prayer must have stillness in it, that you must not rush your prayer like a pecking bird.

A death he had prayed for

There is a supplication the Prophet ﷺ taught: that if Allah has decreed a trial for the people that we may not be able to bear, He take us to Himself before it comes, untested by it. Hudhayfah

used to make that very supplication, and Allah granted it. He lived just long enough to see the assassination of Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him), the event that would tear open the great fitnah among the Muslims, and then he died a natural death only days later, in Iraq, spared from the chaos he had foreseen his whole life.

Even his death carried a lesson. Hudhayfah was poor, and when he asked the young men around him to buy his burial shroud, they brought back an expensive garment. He told them to take it back and buy the simplest two white cloths they could find, saying that these would remain on him only a short time, and that soon Allah would replace them, either with the best of garments or the most wretched, depending on his standing with his Lord. What matters, he was teaching them, is not the cloth they bury you in, but the state of your iman when you meet Allah. On the last night, his fever burning, he prayed, and near dawn he kept repeating, I seek refuge in Allah from waking to the Fire. After Fajr, when death came to him, he said that his beloved one had come at a time of need, that the one who regrets will not succeed, and then, all praise is due to Allah who saved me from the trial, who took me before it came. He wore a ring engraved with the words "all praise is due to Allah," and on those very words he died.

What Hudhayfah's life asks of our faith

Near the end of his life, a young man from Kufa came to Hudhayfah and said what so many of the next generation said to the companions: you got to be with the Prophet ﷺ, how wonderful that must have been. If we had lived then, we would never have let the feet of the Messenger of Allah touch the

ground; we would have carried him on our shoulders. Hudhayfah looked at him and told him the truth.

He told him about the night of the trench, when the believers were starving, freezing, and besieged. The Prophet ﷺ asked, three times, who among them would creep out into the dark and spy on the enemy. Three times, no one rose. These were not lesser men; they were the best generation, and they were beaten down to the edge of what a body can endure. Only when the Prophet ﷺ called Hudhayfah by name did he go, slipping among the enemy in the pitch black, where one wrong word would have meant his death. He saw the storm Allah had sent tearing the enemy's tents apart, heard Abu Sufyan call the siege off, and could have killed him with a single arrow, but he had been told only to gather news, so he held his hand. The point of the whole story is the honesty in it. You say now that you would have carried the Prophet ﷺ on your shoulders, Hudhayfah was saying, but you do not know what you would have done on a night like that. Be grateful for the time Allah placed you in, and for the ease He spared you.

This is the first thing his life asks of you. Stop imagining the grand sacrifice you would make in some other age, and look at the small, real faithfulness Allah is asking of you tonight. Hudhayfah's whole life was built out of ordinary acts of integrity done for the sake of Allah: keeping an oath when breaking it would have been easy, forgiving a wrong when vengeance was his right, giving away a fortune when no one would have blamed him for keeping it, governing an empire and taking only bread for himself. None of these were spectacular in the moment. All of them were sincere, done for Allah alone. The quality to take from him is amanah, trustworthiness before Allah, the inner faithfulness that makes you the same person in private that you

appear to be in public. He was given the secret of the hypocrites precisely because there was no gap in him between the seen and the unseen. Ask whether there is a gap in you, and begin, today, to close it: an honest word where a small lie would be smoother, a promise kept that no one would have held you to, a prayer prayed slowly and with stillness because Allah is watching even when no person is.

And learn from how he feared. While others asked about the good, he asked about the evil, because he knew his own heart could be lost and he refused to be careless with it. That fear was not despair; it was the opposite. It kept him awake, kept him sincere, kept him asking Allah's forgiveness for others until he died. A heart that fears hypocrisy is a heart still alive to its faith. So examine yourself the way he examined himself. Do you say what you do not do? Is your trust, your amanah, with your Lord and with people intact, or is it being lifted from you a little at a time while you sleep? The cure he pointed to was the remembrance of meeting Allah, the same remembrance that let a dying man wave away an expensive shroud as a thing of no weight at all.

Hudhayfah carried a secret his whole life and never broke it. The deeper secret of his life is no secret at all: that a person who is faithful to Allah in the small and hidden things will be trusted by Allah with the great ones, and will be taken to Him in peace. May Allah be pleased with Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman, make firm in our hearts the faith and trustworthiness that filled his, protect us from hypocrisy as He protected him, and gather us with the keeper of the secret and with the beloved Messenger he served.

This chapter follows the account of Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The

Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (12:92). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Maymunah bint al-Harith

The Blessed One

There is a small grave on the road out of Makkah, about thirteen miles from the Kaaba, that almost no one stops at. It sits nestled between apartment buildings, with a grocery store nearby and children playing soccer in the dust. There is barely a place to park. And yet the woman buried there chose that spot herself, with her dying breath, because it was the place where the happiest moment of her life had once unfolded. She was carried back to it after more than sixty years, so that she could die exactly where she had been married. Her name was Maymunah bint al-Harith, and she was the last of the wives of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to leave this world.

To understand her, you have to begin not with her, but with the remarkable family she came from, and with a city that had once driven the Prophet ﷺ out and was now, at last, opening its gates to him again.

A family woven into the heart of Islam

Maymunah bint al-Harith (may Allah be pleased with her) came from one of the most intriguing households in all of the seerah. Her mother was a woman named Hind bint Awf, remembered in the histories as akramu ajuzin fil ard, the most noble elderly woman the world had known by virtue of her lineage and her in-laws. Hind was married at least four times and bore at least nine

children, and through them she became the mother-in-law of the Prophet ﷺ twice over, and at various points the mother-in-law of Abu Bakr, Ja'far, Ali, and Hamza (may Allah be pleased with them all).

Maymunah's older sister was Lubabah bint al-Harith, known as Umm al-Fadl, the mother of the great scholar Abdullah ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with them). Lubabah used to take pride in saying that she embraced Islam on the very same day as Khadijah, that she was the first woman to accept the message after her. Another of the sisters was Zaynab bint Khuzaymah, who also married the Prophet ﷺ and passed away only months later. Two more of the sisters, Asma and Salma bint Umayy, were married to companions like Ja'far and Hamza. The Prophet ﷺ gave these women a single, tender title. He called them al-akhawat al-mu'minat, the believing sisters.

Their tribe was Banu Hilal, a mostly nomadic people skilled in the open desert, known among the Arabs as the in-laws of Banu Hashim, the Prophet's own clan. Maymunah's nephew, the son of one of her relatives, was Khalid ibn al-Walid (may Allah be pleased with him), who at this point in the story was not yet a Muslim, and was in fact one of the fiercest opponents of the message. But he was close to his aunt. Hold that detail. It matters later, because the histories cannot fully capture how these family ties softened hearts and quietly drew people toward Islam.

A homecoming after seven years

Maymunah's story is bound to one of the great turning points of the seerah: the return of the Prophet ﷺ to Makkah after years of exile. Six years after the migration to Madinah came the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah. For six long years the believers had not performed Umrah, had not seen the homeland they loved, had done nothing

but absorb attack after attack from the very city they ached for. The Prophet ﷺ had once turned back as he fled Makkah, looked at the city, and wept, saying, "O Makkah, you are the most beloved of Allah's earth to me. And had your people not expelled me, I would never have left you."

The treaty secured a fragile peace, and the following year, in the month of Dhu al-Qa'dah, the Prophet ﷺ at last returned to perform the Umrat al-Qada, the make-up pilgrimage. He came with two thousand companions. Picture the weight of that moment for people who had been run out of this place fleeing death, who had buried friends and abandoned homes. Now they were walking back in, calling out the talbiyah aloud: Labbayk Allahumma labbayk.

The Prophet ﷺ, ever careful, left two hundred armed men on the outskirts as a precaution, since these were people who had broken treaties before. The rest entered the Haram unarmed. By the terms of the agreement, Quraysh withdrew to the surrounding hills and watched. They watched eighteen hundred Muslims pour into the sacred precinct, men walking briskly in the first rounds of tawaf, shoulders bared, in a deliberate display of strength and conviction. They watched a people they had tried for years to destroy worship Allah alone, openly, joyfully. And as they watched, something began to move in some of their hearts. This pilgrimage was itself an act of da'wah. People came to Islam simply by witnessing it.

A woman who asked for a place beside the Prophet

Into this scene steps Maymunah. Her name then was Barrah, a common name among the Arabs that the Prophet ﷺ disliked because it means "free from sin" and carried the air of a person claiming her own purity. He would later change it.

She had lived a hard life. She had been married twice before, perhaps three times, divorced once and widowed, her last husband a man who had opposed the Prophet ﷺ and died without faith. She was not wealthy. She was not powerful. She was not, the histories tell us plainly, particularly sought after for marriage. She was counted among the mustad'afin, the weak and vulnerable ones of Makkah, a woman alone in a hostile city with little to protect her. Her only real shelter was the standing of her brothers-in-law, chief among them al-Abbas, the Prophet's uncle.

And yet this woman, in her vulnerability, did something quietly brave. She let it be known to her relatives that she wished to marry the Prophet ﷺ. She went to Ja'far, her brother-in-law, and said, in effect, that she longed to be tied by family to Banu Hashim the way her sisters were. She told her sister Lubabah the same. It was her gentle, hopeful way of asking: would the Messenger of Allah ﷺ take interest in someone like me?

Word reached al-Abbas, and al-Abbas was someone whose requests the Prophet ﷺ did not like to refuse. He came to his nephew and spoke of his sister-in-law, now widowed and alone and no longer sought, and asked plainly, "Are you interested in marrying her, O Messenger of Allah?" And the Prophet ﷺ accepted.

According to several of the early commentators, including Qatadah and al-Zuhri, Maymunah is the woman Allah refers to in His Book, the believing woman who offered herself to the Prophet ﷺ:

Prophet, We have made lawful for you the wives whose bride gift you have paid... Also any believing woman who has offered herself to the Prophet and whom the Prophet

wishes to wed: this is only for you [Prophet] and not the rest of the believers... God is most forgiving, most merciful.

QUR'AN 33:50

Notice how Allah honours her in that verse. He does not call her poor, or widowed, or weak, the labels the city had hung on her. He calls her mu'minah, a believing woman. The world saw a woman with nothing to offer. Allah named her by her faith and recorded her offer of herself in a verse to be recited until the end of time.

The joy at the camel's side

Maymunah waited at a distance on her camel for the answer. She knew that al-Abbas had gone to the Prophet ﷺ, and that the beloved Ja'far had gone too. When Ja'far finally approached, she could read the good news in the way he walked before he ever spoke. He told her the Prophet ﷺ had accepted her proposal.

She climbed down from her camel in sheer joy and said, "The camel and whatever is on it is for the Messenger of Allah." She had so little, and she wanted to give all of it. It was the gesture of a heart overflowing, a woman who owned almost nothing reaching for the one thing she could press into the hands of the Prophet ﷺ to express what the moment meant to her.

The Prophet ﷺ had only three days in Makkah under the terms of the treaty. Ever the caller to Allah, he saw even his own wedding as a chance to bring hearts together. He suggested holding the wedding feast, the walima, inside Makkah, so that the leaders of Quraysh and the people of Banu Hilal might attend and the ice between them might melt a little. But Quraysh refused coldly. "We have no need of your walima," they told him. "We want you out of Makkah. This has been enough of you." Three

days, and not a moment more. After all his years of patience, it was a deeply wounding reply.

So the Prophet ﷺ withdrew to a place called Sarif, about thirteen miles outside the Haram on the road to Madinah, the closest point he could reach without breaking the treaty. There he held the wedding. Some of the non-Muslims still came, family and relatives, and among those drawing near to Islam in this very season was Khalid ibn al-Walid. Many people imagine Khalid embraced Islam at the conquest of Makkah, but the histories place his acceptance earlier, around this make-up Umrah. Some scholars suggest that the Prophet's marriage to his aunt Maymunah was part of what finally drew this brilliant, fierce man the rest of the way to faith. We cannot measure it precisely, but we can see the pattern: a marriage to a vulnerable woman, and a softening that helped bring one of Islam's greatest generals home.

It was here that the Prophet ﷺ gave Barrah her new name. He called her Maymunah, which means the blessed one, mubarakah. The scholars say he chose it because her marriage coincided with the joy of his return to Makkah after seven years. Her name became a sign, a glad tiding, a seal upon a blessed and long-awaited homecoming.

What she taught the ummah from inside the home

When the Prophet ﷺ returned to Madinah, Maymunah came with him, and around the same time her sister's whole family, including the young Abdullah ibn Abbas, settled there too. Maymunah would have only three years with the Prophet ﷺ, the final three years of his life. But she used them, and what she carried out of that home has shaped how Muslims worship to this day.

It was in her house, on her night, that the famous scene with Abdullah ibn Abbas took place. He was her nephew, and he plotted to study the Prophet ﷺ up close. He asked his aunt Maymunah if he could spend the night, and she asked the Prophet ﷺ, who agreed. The rooms were so small there was no spare bed, so the boy lay across the foot of theirs and watched. He would later narrate, in exquisite detail, how the Prophet ﷺ rose for the night prayer, how he made wudu, how he recited the last ten verses of Surat Al Imran, how he stood and prayed in the dark. An entire treasury of the Prophet's worship reached the ummah because Maymunah opened her home to a curious ten-year-old on the one night that was hers.

Maymunah herself became a careful narrator of the Prophet's most intimate acts of devotion, the things only someone in his household could witness. She described his night prayer, his ghusl step by step, the way he would spread his arms so wide in prostration that the whiteness of his underarms could be seen. She narrated questions of purity and women's fiqh, gently correcting the harsher, rigid notions some had absorbed from the surrounding tribes. She narrated which foods were lawful. She narrated the great hadith that a single prayer in the Prophet's mosque is better than a thousand elsewhere, save the Sacred Mosque in Makkah. Roughly seventy narrations of the Prophet ﷺ flow through her, and nearly all of them, tellingly, touch on worship.

Two of her reports glow with particular tenderness. In one, she noticed one morning that the Prophet ﷺ seemed heavy, burdened, his usual warmth dimmed. She could read his mood the moment he entered the house, because he came home with such joy that any shadow on his face was immediately plain to her. He told her that the angel Jibril had promised to come and

had not, and Jibril never broke a promise. He spent the whole day distressed, until he discovered a puppy had crept under a cot in the house. Once it was removed and the place cleaned, Jibril came, and explained that the angels do not enter a house in which there is a dog or an image. That entire teaching reached us through Maymunah's eyes.

In the other, on the scorching Day of Arafah during the Prophet's only Hajj, the companions did not dare interrupt his unbroken supplication to ask whether he was fasting, and they were collapsing in the heat, assuming he must be. Maymunah understood. She quietly sent him a cup of milk. He raised it where everyone could see, and drank, and at once the exhausted companions began to drink too, released by his example. A small kindness, perfectly timed, that became a teaching for the whole ummah about the sunnah of not fasting on Arafah while standing in its heat.

A long life of quiet righteousness

After the Prophet ﷺ passed away, Maymunah lived as the wives of the Prophet learned to live: simply, frugally, with the world held at arm's length. She was no stranger to scarcity. There is a striking detail in her story: she would frequently take loans, qard hasan, and faithfully repay them, living for much of her life on borrowed money. Some companions felt this was beneath a Mother of the Believers and urged her to stop. She answered with a hadith she had heard from the Prophet ﷺ himself, calling him khalili, my dear friend: that no one takes a loan, with Allah knowing he truly intends to repay it, except that Allah helps him repay it in this life. She was not afraid of debt, because her heart was sincere about returning it. This woman who owned a house

in Paradise lived in this world on borrowed coins, and was content.

She loved to free slaves, and she did it with a beauty all her own. She would not simply purchase a person out of bondage and send them off. She would make du'a for them as she set them free. And many of those she freed went on to become scholars and narrators of hadith, so that you find in the books of tradition the freed slave of Maymunah narrating from the freed slave of Ibn Abbas, an entire chain of people lifted from servitude into the noblest service of all, the carrying of sacred knowledge.

She was, as Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) testified, among the most God-fearing of the wives of the Prophet ﷺ and the most devoted to keeping the ties of kinship. Aisha called her al-mar'a as-saliha, the righteous woman, al-mar'a at-taqiyyah, the pious woman, high praise indeed from her. Maymunah spent on her relatives, the near and the far, and cared for them. Yet her kindness never softened her sense of Allah's limits. When a relative once came to her smelling of wine, she would not let him near and told him, "Go to the Muslims and purify yourself." She loved her family, but she would not let love for them override obedience to her Lord. After the Prophet's death she also performed Hajj nearly every year, perhaps fifty times in all.

She outlived every other wife of the Prophet ﷺ, and every one of the rightly guided caliphs. By the time she fell ill, more than sixty years had passed since the migration. And in her sickness she remembered something her husband had told her long ago, that she would not die in Makkah. So she asked to be carried out. "Take me to Sarif," she said. To the very place, thirteen miles down the Madinah road, where the Prophet ﷺ had married her more than sixty years before. They carried her to the spot of the

greatest memory of her life, and there she died, and there she was buried, in the exact place where the wedding tent had once stood.

Because the generation that had known her was mostly gone, some of the younger people did not recognise who she was. So as her body was carried, Abdullah ibn Abbas, who led her funeral prayer, called out to the people: "This is Maymunah. This is your mother. When you lift her, do not be rough, do not shake her." Her nephew Khalid ibn al-Walid helped lower her into the grave. The boy who had once studied the Prophet's prayer at her feet now prayed over her body, and the general she had loved as a nephew laid her to rest.

What Maymunah's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read past a life like Maymunah's. She did not lead armies or rule a household of fame. The world counted her among the weak, the overlooked, the unsought. And that is exactly why her life puts such a searching question to our own iman.

She wanted nearness to the Prophet ﷺ, and she was not too proud, or too afraid of rejection, to ask for it. A woman with nothing the world values reached, openly, for the highest companionship she could imagine, and Allah answered her by recording her offer in His Book and naming her by her faith. Ask yourself what you are reaching for. We spend our boldness chasing things that will not outlast us, and grow timid only when it comes to asking Allah for nearness to Him, for guidance, for a place among the righteous. Maymunah's life says: ask. Turn your longing toward Allah and what brings you close to Him, and do not assume you are too small to be answered. The One who lifted

a widow from the margins of Makkah into the verses of the Qur'an does not measure people the way the city did.

She found her contentment in Allah, not in her circumstances. She lived on borrowed money and was at peace, because her trust was in the promise of her Lord, not in the size of her purse. She freed the captive and prayed for them. She gave to her relatives but would not bend Allah's law to please them. This is the quiet, unglamorous shape of taqwa in an ordinary life: to be generous without being compromised, to be gentle without being weak, to hold to Allah's limits even with the people you love most. You may never be tested by armies or empires. You will certainly be tested by your own family, your own money, your own comfort, and that is where Maymunah shows you how a believing heart stays upright.

And here is the part that should move you. She held in her memory, for sixty years, one moment of pure joy, the day the Prophet ﷺ married her, and at the end of her long life that memory was so dear that she asked to die in its very place. Her whole heart was anchored to something good and true. Let your heart find such an anchor. Let the love of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ be the memory you carry, the place you return to, the thing you want to be near when everything else falls away. The graves of this world are mostly forgotten, tucked between buildings while children play nearby. But the soul that spent its days reaching for Allah, content with His decree, faithful in small things, is not forgotten by the One it sought.

So take one thing from her into your week. Ask Allah, plainly and boldly, for nearness to Him. Give something quietly to someone in need and pray for them as you give. Hold to one of His commands even when love or comfort tempts you to bend it.

That is how the blessed one lived, in faith, in contentment, in longing for what is good, and it is a path still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Maymunah, the last of our mothers to depart this world, and gather us in the company she now keeps, near the Prophet ﷺ she loved.

This chapter follows the account of Maymunah bint al-Harith (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (33:50). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Safiyya bint Huyayy

The Truthful One

There is a kind of faith that is tested not by an enemy but by the very people you have come to call your own. Safiyya bint Huyayy (may Allah be pleased with her) carried that test for the whole of her life. She came into Islam from the household of the man who had worked harder than anyone to destroy it, and for the rest of her days a quiet question followed her wherever she went: can we really trust her? She answered it the only way a believer can. Not with arguments, but with a heart so soft, so loyal, and so honest that in the end the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself stood as her witness and swore by Allah that she was telling the truth.

Her story is unlike any other among the Mothers of the Believers, because she alone among the wives of the Prophet ﷺ was not of Arab lineage. She was a daughter of Bani Isra'il, a descendant of the prophets, and the road that brought her to the household of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ ran straight through the hardest grief a person can know.

A daughter of prophets, a daughter of the chief

Her name was Safiyya, and it means the chosen one. Unlike some of the other Mothers whose names were changed, this had been her name from birth, the name she grew up with. She was the daughter of Huyayy ibn Akhtab, the chief of Banu Nadir, the most powerful of the Jewish tribes of Madinah. Her mother, Barra

bint Samaw'al, was of the nobility of Banu Qurayza, another of those great tribes. So Safiyya was royalty on both sides, a noble woman of two noble houses.

But her lineage reached back further than that. Through her people she was a descendant of Ibrahim, and through Ibrahim a descendant of Harun, the brother of Musa. Her father was of the line of the prophet Harun. Her great uncle, in that sense, was Musa himself. She was a woman in whom the blood of prophets ran, and when the Prophet ﷺ married her, he joined his household to the lineage of Bani Isra'il, a quiet thread of symbolism running through the whole of her story.

These tribes had not come to Madinah by accident. They had migrated to that region generations earlier because they had read in their scriptures that a prophet would arise there, and they had settled in the land to be near him when he came. They were waiting for a prophet. The tragedy of Safiyya's family is that the prophet came, and her father recognised him, and rejected him anyway.

The night her father chose to be an enemy

Safiyya tells the story herself, and it is one of the most revealing things she ever said. She was, by her own account, the most beloved of all the children to her father, and beloved too of her uncle Abu Yasir. If they saw her among her siblings, or even among Abu Yasir's own children, they would have eyes only for her. Her father adored her. This is worth holding onto, because of what came next. People are often more than one thing. A man can be tender in his own home and merciless outside it. Her father was both.

When the Prophet ﷺ arrived at Quba at the very beginning of the Hijrah, her father and her uncle went out together in the morning to see him, to see whether this was truly the prophet they had been waiting for. Safiyya, still a child, waited at home all day for them to return. They came back after the sun had set, dragging, beaten down, slumping with the weight of something. And for the first time in her life, they paid her no attention at all. She went to them the way she always did, expecting their love, and not one of them so much as turned toward her.

So she stood there and listened. Her uncle said to her father, "Is it really him?" Her father answered, "Yes, by Allah, it is him." Her uncle pressed: "And you are certain? You can confirm that this is the one?" Her father said, "Yes." Then her uncle asked the question that decided everything: "What is in your heart toward him?" And her father said, "Enmity. By Allah, enmity, for as long as I live."

He knew. That is the unbearable part. He knew exactly who the Prophet ﷺ was, and he chose to spend his life fighting him. It was the same disease that had gripped Abu Jahl in Makkah, who had listened to the Qur'an and admitted privately, "I know he is a prophet of Allah, I know he is telling the truth," and then rejected him because the prophet had not come from his own tribe. The chief rabbi of Madinah, Abdullah ibn Salam, embraced Islam the moment he saw the Prophet ﷺ. Her father saw the same man and declared war, because the prophet was not an Israelite, was not from his own people. Knowledge is not faith. Her father had the knowledge. He simply would not bend his pride to it.

The dream of the moon

The years that followed were years of treachery. Her father became the chief instigator of betrayal from within Madinah, the

one who worked with the enemies of Makkah during the Battle of the Trench to break the treaties and destroy the Prophet ﷺ from the inside. And through all of it, the Prophet ﷺ, who knew through revelation what was being plotted against him, did not strike on the basis of rumour. He tried for years to reconcile the tribes, to soften the malice, to bring people together. He succeeded with some. Her father was not among them. When the reckoning came at Khaybar, in the seventh year after the Hijrah, her father was killed.

Safiyya had been married twice before. Her first marriage, to a man named Salam ibn Mishkam, had ended in divorce. Her second husband was Kinanah ibn Abi al-Huqayq, one of the chief insiders against the Prophet ﷺ, a poet, and by her own testimony a cruel and abusive man. Her last memory of him was a violent one. She had woken from a dream in which she saw the full moon rising over Khaybar, and the moon descended and came to rest in her lap. She did not understand it. She thought only that it was a beautiful thing she had seen. When she told her husband, he struck her hard across the face and said, "You desire the king of Yathrib? You desire Muhammad?" The blow left a green bruise near her eye that had not yet faded when the rest of her life began.

At Khaybar, both her father and her husband were killed. In a single battle she lost the man she loved and the man she had endured. And then, a prisoner, she was led away from the only world she had ever known.

Mercy on the battlefield

Even in the harshness of war, the character of the Prophet ﷺ shone in a way his enemies could not imagine. When the battle was over, Bilal (may Allah be pleased with him) was escorting the

captive women away, and his path took them directly past the place where the fallen lay. A woman beside Safiyya saw her dead and began to scream and tear at herself. The Prophet ﷺ was angered by this. He turned to Bilal and said, "Has mercy been stripped from you, Bilal, that you would lead these women past their slain men?" Think of the contrast. This was the same battlefield ethic of a man whose own uncle, Hamza, had been mutilated and put on display by his enemies at Uhud. And here the Prophet ﷺ could not bear that grieving women should even glimpse their dead. He had Bilal take them another way.

Among the captives, Safiyya had fallen to the share of Dihya (may Allah be pleased with him). But a man came to the Prophet ﷺ and said, "Messenger of Allah, you gave Dihya a captive who is Safiyya bint Huyayy, the lady of Qurayza and Nadir. She is fit for no one but you." He meant that a woman of such standing should not be an ordinary captive. The Prophet ﷺ called her forward.

What he said to her was almost an apology for the cruelty of the world. He said, gently, that her father had been the most vicious of all toward him, fighting him until Allah took him. He was telling her: I did not want this. I am not a man who loves to fight, who loves to kill. And her answer astonished him. She said, "Messenger of Allah, Allah says in His Book that no soul shall bear the burden of another." She was quoting the Qur'an to him. A woman from the tribes that had fought him, standing as a captive before him, answered the Prophet ﷺ with a verse of the Book that was being revealed to him:

No burdened soul will bear the burden of another: even if a heavily laden soul should cry for help, none of its load will be carried, not even by a close relative. But you [Prophet]

can only warn those who fear their Lord, though they cannot see Him, and keep up the prayer- whoever purifies himself does so for his own benefit, everything returns to God.

QUR'AN 35:18

She was saying: do not hold my father's war against me. I am not him. And the Prophet ﷺ did not. He gave her a choice no captive expected. He said, "I give you the choice. If you accept Islam, I will keep you for myself. And if you wish to remain upon your religion, I will set you free and return you to your people." A free woman, returned home, no harm upon her. That was the offer.

"Allah and His Messenger are more beloved to me"

Her reply settled the matter forever, and it settled it on the side of faith. She told him plainly: "Messenger of Allah, I longed for Islam, and I bore witness to your prophethood before you ever invited me to it. I have no father among my people now, no brother, no one left." And then she said the words that would answer her critics for the rest of her life and beyond it: "Allah and His Messenger are more beloved to me than freedom."

She was not choosing a way out of captivity. She was choosing Allah. Given the open door to walk free and keep her old life, she shut it herself and chose the harder, higher road. The Prophet ﷺ honoured her in a way no one had expected. He did not keep her as a captive at all. He set her free, and made her freedom her dowry, and married her. He instituted, in her case, a waiting period of dignity, a respect for her that was unheard of in the wars of that age.

The marriage was hard for some of the Muslims to accept. She was from Banu Nadir, the tribe that had been so bitterly hostile,

the daughter of the man they hated most. On the journey back, when she had first signalled she was ready for the wedding feast and then drawn back, the Prophet ﷺ simply continued without complaint. She explained later that she had feared a counterattack while they were still close to Khaybar, that she would feel safer farther from her old home. The Prophet ﷺ confirmed she had spoken truthfully. The companions had murmured their suspicion, and the Prophet ﷺ had seen, instead, her loyalty and her honesty, and he loved her for it.

The wedding feast was a simple, beautiful thing. On the road back to Madinah, at a place called Sadd al-Rawha, the Prophet ﷺ called the people together for a kind of shared meal. A leather sheet was spread out, and everyone brought what they had: some brought dates, some cheese, some butter, and the date paste called hais was prepared. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Eat from the wedding feast of your mother." He was naming her a Mother of the Believers in front of them all. And in his humility, when she mounted the camel, he knelt and put out his knee so that she could step on his leg to climb up. She was so shy of him, of who he was, that she hardly knew what to do.

The heart that would not turn bitter

Their first night, they talked until morning. He asked her about the green bruise still near her eye, and she told him about the dream of the moon and the blow that had followed it. She admitted, with painful honesty, that one feeling still lingered in her: this was the man who had, in the end, fought the battle in which her father and her husband died. She had loved her father. And the Prophet ﷺ, as if he already knew, spoke to her gently about all the ways her father had turned the Arabs against him, all the treachery, until, as she put it, every hard feeling left her heart. He kept

explaining himself to her, almost apologising, though he had no need to, until there was nothing left in her toward him but love.

This was the human truth of it. And the suspicion of others never let her rest. The morning after the wedding, the Prophet ﷺ found Abu Ayyub al-Ansari (may Allah be pleased with him) circling his tent with a drawn sword, keeping watch in case the new bride meant him harm. When the Prophet ﷺ asked what he was doing, Abu Ayyub said he had simply been afraid for him. The Prophet ﷺ understood it came from love, and prayed good for him. But the pattern was set. When the exhausted camel stumbled and the Prophet ﷺ and Safiyya slipped, the women cried out, "May Allah drive the Jewish woman away from him," as though she were a curse. Her whole life in Islam would carry this shadow: we do not trust her.

Even the Mother of the Believers, Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), in a moment of very human jealousy, slipped out covered so she would not be known, to go and look at this new wife. When the Prophet ﷺ asked her what she had seen, she said, "I saw just another Jewish woman." And the Prophet ﷺ corrected her, gently and firmly: "Do not say that, Aisha. She has accepted Islam, and her Islam is good." Aisha never said it again. But others did. More than once, some of the wives reminded Safiyya that they were more honoured, more beloved, that they were of the Prophet's own people and she was not. One day the Prophet ﷺ found her in tears because one of them had thrown her lineage in her face, calling her the daughter of a Jew. And he gave her the most beautiful answer a wounded heart could receive. He said, "How can they be better than you, when your father is Harun, your uncle is Musa, and your husband is Muhammad?" Who, he was telling her, is more noble than you?

There is a phrase that entered the language of the Muslims from her life. One night, late in Ramadan, the Prophet ﷺ was in his retreat in the mosque, and Safiyya came to visit him. When she rose to leave, he walked her home, for her house stood at some distance. Two men of the Ansar saw the Prophet ﷺ walking with a woman in the dark and hurried past, embarrassed. He called them back and said, "Take it slowly. This is Safiyya bint Huyayy. She is my wife." They were mortified: "Glory be to Allah, Messenger of Allah, would we think anything of you?" And he said, "Satan flows through the human being as blood flows through the veins. I feared he might cast something into your hearts." From this comes the saying, "She is Safiyya," meaning: make things clear, do not leave room for suspicion to take root, clear your name before doubt can grow. It is a lesson made for an age of whispers and screens.

What Safiyya's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read Safiyya's life and feel only sympathy for a woman so often wronged. But her life is not asking for our sympathy. It is asking something of our iman.

When the scholars looked for the one quality that defined her, the one thing that was her superpower, they did not name long nights of prayer or constant fasting, as they did for others. Imam adh-Dhahabi said she was a woman of hilm and waqar: forbearance, dignity, a heart of gold. She was soft, nurturing, full of empathy and care, the very softness the Prophet ﷺ himself carried toward his ummah. When he lay dying and in pain, she wept and said, "By Allah, Messenger of Allah, I wish your pain were mine instead." The other wives rolled their eyes, as if she were only making a show of devotion. And the Prophet ﷺ, between life and death, told them to wash out their mouths, and said, "By Allah,

she is telling the truth." That she was honest, that she was sincere, was the testimony he gave her with some of his last breaths.

Look at what she did with the empathy she had been given. After his death, a servant girl went to Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) and accused her of still keeping the Sabbath and still siding with the Jews of Madinah, one more attempt to cast suspicion on her. When Umar asked her, she answered: she had not loved the Sabbath since Allah gave her Friday in its place, so that part was a lie. But as for the Jews of Madinah, "they are my kin, and so I keep the ties of kinship with them." She would not punish the innocent among her relatives for what others had done. She lived the very verse she had once quoted to the Prophet ﷺ: no soul bears the burden of another. Then she called the servant girl who had tried to ruin her, and instead of punishing her, said, "Go, you are free." Forgiveness, and freedom on top of it, to the one who had wronged her. That is what hilm looks like when it is real.

Here is what her life puts to you. The ease of faith is to love Allah when the people around you love you for it. The test of faith is to hold to Allah when you are doubted, accused, and made to feel that you do not belong, and to refuse to let any of it turn your heart hard. Safiyya was given every reason to grow bitter: a father who chose enmity, a husband who struck her, a community that whispered about her for years. She answered all of it with softness. She fed the besieged with her own hands, she forgave the one who slandered her, she kept the ties of kin with those who had no claim on her kindness, and when she died she left part of her wealth to a brother who never accepted Islam, because he was still her family. None of this was for the eyes of

people. The people, in fact, mostly suspected her. It was for Allah.

So take her quality, hilm, into your own ordinary life, where someone misjudges you, where your sincerity is questioned, where you are not given the benefit of the doubt. Do not let it harden you. Forgive the one who wronged you when you have every right to strike back. Keep the tie of kinship with the relative who has cut you off. Choose Allah and His Messenger over the comfort of fitting in, the way she chose them over her freedom. And trust that the verdict that matters is not the one the people pass on you, but the one Allah records, the same Allah who put His own Messenger forward to say of her, "By Allah, she is truthful." May Allah be pleased with Safiyya bint Huyayy, soften our hearts with a measure of her forbearance, and gather us with the truthful in the gardens of those He loves.

This chapter follows the account of Safiyya bint Huyayy (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (35:18). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Juwayriya bint al-Harith

A Blessing to Her People

She came to Madinah in chains, the daughter of a defeated chief, her husband dead on the field and her father fled into the hills. By every measure the world understood, she had lost everything. And yet, before the season was out, every captive of her tribe would walk free because of her, her people would become allies instead of enemies, and her own father would stand before the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and say the words of faith. The histories preserve a single sentence about her from the woman who first opened the door to her, our mother Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her): no woman was ever a greater blessing to her people than Juwayriya was to hers.

To understand how a captive became a blessing, you have to begin with the people she came from, and the marriage that no one expected.

The princess of Banu al-Mustaliq

Her name, in those days, was Barrah, and she was the daughter of al-Harith ibn Abi Dirar, the chief of Banu al-Mustaliq. They were a powerful tribe living between Makkah and Madinah, near a body of water called al-Muraysi', and they were bound by blood and old loyalty to Quraysh. To be the daughter of their chief was to be, in everything but the word, a princess. She was raised in

standing, in dignity, in the expectation that the world would arrange itself around her name.

When the Prophet ﷺ and the believers made their hijra to Madinah, the tribes of the region were forced to choose. Banu al-Mustaliq had stayed out of Makkah's internal quarrels in the early years, but they had an interest now: the caravans that fed Makkah passed through their land, and the Muslims of Madinah, expelled from their homes and stripped of their property, had begun to intercept those caravans. So Banu al-Mustaliq threw in their lot with Quraysh. They sent reinforcements to fight the Muslims, and then, encouraged by Quraysh, they began to plan something of their own: a surprise attack on Madinah. The reasoning whispered to them was simple and cruel. You have no open hostility with Muhammad. He will not expect you. Catch the believers unaware, seize their goods, enslave their people. It is an easy victory, and the spoils are enormous.

They did not understand the man they were planning against. The Prophet ﷺ did not strike at people on the strength of a rumour, and he did not attack the unsuspecting in injustice. So when word of the plot reached him, his first act was not to march. It was to verify.

The scout, the siege, and the trials of the road

He sent a man named Buraydah al-Aslami, and the choice of this man is itself worth pausing over. Buraydah was a simple bedouin who had met the Prophet ﷺ years earlier, on the road of the hijra itself, when the Prophet ﷺ was fleeing for his life and still stopped to ask a stranger shepherding his sheep whether he had heard of Islam. Buraydah had never heard of it. He listened, and he believed on the spot, and he brought dozens of his people into the faith with him. Now this man, unknown to the people of

Makkah and unknown to Banu al-Mustaliq, was the perfect scout. He went to them posing as a mercenary eager for a share of the plunder, and al-Harith confirmed everything to his face: the plan was real, the timing was set, the attack was coming. Buraydah returned and told the Prophet ﷺ the truth.

Only then did the Prophet ﷺ march, to stop an attack before it could fall. He left Madinah itself, not merely its outskirts, putting Zayd ibn Haritha in charge of the city, carrying the banner of the Muhajirin with Abu Bakr and the banner of the Ansar with another of the companions. And here something strange happened. The same hypocrites who had invented every excuse to avoid the hard campaigns now crowded eagerly to come along, because this looked like an easy win with rich spoils, a chance to march beside the Prophet ﷺ and gather wealth at little cost.

The siege, when it came, was swift and almost bloodless. The Prophet ﷺ had the archers rain arrows down upon Banu al-Mustaliq until, within about an hour, they surrendered. Fewer than ten of their men were killed. Only one of the believers fell, an Ansari struck by mistake by one of his own side's arrows. The great idol Manat, one of the chief idols of all Arabia, was destroyed. And the spoils were vast: thousands of camels, hundreds of goats, a hundred families among the captives.

The road home carried trials heavier than the battle. It was here that the leader of the hypocrites, seeing the Muhajirin and Ansar mingled together, tried to turn them against each other, muttering that when they returned to Madinah the mighty would expel the weak, plotting in his heart a coup against the Prophet ﷺ while they were far from home. Allah exposed his words and foiled the plot. And it was here, too, that the same man set loose the great slander against our mother Aisha, the talk of the town that would

distract every tongue from his own treachery. This was the journey on which Aisha lost her necklace and the army was halted to search for it. Into the middle of all this, unaware of any of it, came a captive woman of unusual bearing, asking for help.

The knock at the door

Among the captives was Barrah, the chief's daughter. Her husband, Musafi', had been one of the dead. Her father had escaped into the hills. She had fallen, by the distribution of the captives, to one of the companions, and she had done at once what a woman of her intelligence would do: she invoked the contract of ransom, the mukatabah, agreeing on a set price and a fair term by which she could buy back her freedom. The price was seven measures of silver. She did not intend to remain a captive a day longer than she had to.

She had seen something, too, that she did not yet understand. Three nights before the army reached al-Muraysi', she had dreamt of the moon rising and settling over Madinah. She did not know how to read it. The believers, who remembered such a sign from before, would have understood it at once.

So she came to the door of the Prophet ﷺ, and it was our mother Aisha who answered. Aisha was an honest woman, and she has left us an honest account: she looked at Juwayriya and felt a flash of something close to dread. Here was a woman of striking beauty and elegance and eloquence, a woman whom no one could mistake for ordinary, who captivated the moment she spoke. Aisha says plainly that she disliked her on sight, knowing the Prophet ﷺ would see in her exactly what she herself was seeing.

Barrah spoke with the composure of her lineage. I am the daughter of al-Harith, the lord of his people, she said. You know the calamity that has come upon me. I have fallen into captivity and made a contract for my freedom, and I have come to you for help with my ransom. She had come, in other words, expecting him to pay a price.

He offered her something she had not imagined. The Prophet ﷺ could have simply paid her ransom and let her go, and he was willing to. Those who attack his memory conveniently forget that by every rule of war in that age, he could have kept her captive and no one would have blinked. He did neither. He said to her: shall I offer you something better than that? She asked what it was. He said: that I pay your ransom, and marry you. And she said, yes, I will marry you, Messenger of Allah.

The blessing that set a people free

He married her, and the news ran through Madinah like water finding its level. The believers understood at once what it meant, and they reasoned among themselves: how can we hold the in-laws of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ as captives? Even if these people had been hostile, even if they had planned an attack, they were now the family of the Prophet ﷺ. And so, one after another, the believers freed their captives, a hundred families restored to liberty and given back their possessions, not by command but by sheer reverence for the bond a single marriage had created.

This is the moment Aisha later marked with her famous words: I do not know of any woman who was a greater blessing to her people than Juwayriya. She had walked into Madinah a prisoner, and within days she had become the door through which her entire tribe walked out free. Where there had been war, there was now peace between the believers and Banu al-Mustaliq, and

many of them embraced Islam, moved by a generosity they had never expected from the people they had set out to destroy.

The story was not finished. Her father, al-Harith, knew nothing of the marriage. He had gathered everything he had left, his hidden wealth, his camels and goats, and set out for Madinah to ransom his daughter. On the way he passed through a blessed valley on the city's edge, and his eye fell on two camels among his herd that he loved too much to part with, and he hid them away before going on. He came before the Prophet ﷺ and said: Muhammad, you have taken my daughter captive, and here is her ransom. And the Prophet ﷺ smiled at him and asked: where are the two camels you hid in the valley? He described the exact place. Al-Harith stood stunned. No one had seen what he did. No one knew where those camels were except Allah. In that instant he said the words: I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and that you are the Messenger of Allah. His two sons, Juwayriya's brothers, said them with him. The Prophet ﷺ then told the joyful father that he had married his daughter, and with that the Islam of all Banu al-Mustaliq was secured. The tribe that had marched to attack Madinah was now among its allies, and one of Juwayriya's own brothers would go on to narrate hadith.

The new name, and the woman she became

He changed her name. Barrah meant something like the pure, the abundantly righteous, and the Prophet ﷺ disliked names that sounded like a person praising her own piety, and he disliked even more that it might be said he had left Barrah, that the very grammar of her old name could be twisted into something improper about him. So he named her Juwayriya. And the new name marked the beginning of a new woman.

This is the detail that should arrest us, the same pattern repeated in home after home of the Prophet ﷺ. People came to him from backgrounds of wealth and prestige and standing, and the moment they truly saw the man he was, their hunger for this world simply fell away. A woman raised as a chief's daughter, accustomed to comfort, became a worshipper who would not let possessions rest in her house. Whatever food came in went out again to the poor almost as quickly as it arrived. The Prophet ﷺ came home one day and asked if there was anything to eat, and she told him the only thing in the house was a bone left over from what a freed servant had given them, and he ate what he could from it, and that was all. This was the home of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and the home of one of the most powerful women of pre-Islamic Arabia, and there was nothing in it.

She became known above all for two things: her fasting, and her remembrance of Allah. From her we learn a ruling of the religion itself. The Prophet ﷺ came to her on a Friday while she was fasting, and asked: did you fast yesterday? She said no. He asked: do you intend to fast tomorrow? She said no. He told her to break her fast, and from this we learn that a believer does not single out Friday for fasting. The lesson reached the whole community through a woman who loved nothing more than to fast for the sake of Allah.

The qualities the Qur'an gathers and praises were the very qualities of her days:

For men and women who are devoted to God- believing men and women, obedient men and women, truthful men and women, steadfast men and women, humble men and women, charitable men and women, fasting men and women, chaste men and women, men and women who

remember God often- God has prepared forgiveness and a rich reward.

QUR'AN 33:35

She was among the men and women who remember God often, and she remembered Him so much that the conversations in her home were said to revolve around His remembrance. From this came one of the most beloved gifts the Prophet ﷺ ever left this ummah. He went out one morning at dawn and left her sitting in the small corner of her home that she had set aside for prayer, her own little place of worship, and she stayed there in the remembrance of Allah. When he returned hours later, she had not moved. He said to her: you have been in this place all this time? She said yes, I have been remembering Allah. And he taught her four phrases, and told her that if they were weighed against all the hours of remembrance she had just poured out, these few words would outweigh them: glory be to Allah and praise be to Him, as many as the number of His creation, as much as pleases Him, as heavy as the weight of His throne, and as endless as the ink that records His words. As many as His creation, all that we can see and all that we cannot, beyond counting; as much as pleases a Lord whose pleasure has no limit; as heavy as His mighty throne; as endless as His words. Three repetitions of this, he told her, outweighed her morning.

Think of what that means. Every believer who says these words at dawn and at dusk, in every century since, says a remembrance that came to us through Juwayriya, and she earns its reward, for the one who guides to good has the reward of all who act upon it. If she had narrated nothing else in her life, this alone would have made her, again, a blessing without measure, this time to an entire ummah.

She lived out her years far from conflict. She saw the great trials that tore at the community after the Prophet ﷺ, and she kept herself clear of every one of them, never lending her voice to this faction or that, the very embodiment of the one who remembers Allah and turns away from foolishness. When she was once wounded by being reminded that she had come as a captive, that her station was somehow beneath the others, she went to the Prophet ﷺ, and he comforted her as he always did, reminding her that her ransom was higher than the dowry given to any of his wives, sending her away consoled. She died some fifty-six years after the hijra, a woman whose whole life after that knock at the door was given to the remembrance of her Lord, a wife of the Prophet ﷺ in the Garden.

What Juwayriya's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a story like this as a tale of a happy ending: the captive who became a queen, the war that turned to peace. But the deeper question her life puts to us is not about reversal of fortune. It is about what a soul does with whatever Allah has decreed for it.

Juwayriya lost her husband, her freedom, her father's protection, and her whole world in a single morning. She did not rage at her fate or curse her captors. She acted with dignity, she sought the lawful way out that was open to her, and when something far better than freedom was offered, a tie to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, she chose it without hesitation. This is contentment with the decree of Allah in its truest form: not passivity, but trust, the quiet certainty that the One who allowed the loss can turn it into a mercy you could never have arranged for yourself. She thought she had lost everything, and through that very loss Allah freed a hundred families and brought a whole people to faith. Your

hardest day may be the door Allah is opening to a good you cannot yet see. The believer's task is to meet it with patience and to keep choosing Him.

And look at what she became when the world fell away. She had been a chief's daughter, surrounded by everything wealth could buy, and the moment her heart was filled with Allah, she could not bear to keep food in her house overnight. The thing to imitate here is not the poverty; it is the freedom. She held this world loosely because she had found something heavier than the weight of the throne to set against it. We clutch our possessions and our comforts and our standing as if they were our security, and they are not. Her life asks whether your heart is free enough to give something away today, quietly, for the sake of Allah alone, the way she gave away the bone of meat and the morning of dhikr without anyone keeping count.

Most of all, take her remembrance. The Prophet ﷺ taught her that a few sincere words, said with a heart turned toward Allah, can outweigh hours of distracted effort, that what matters in the sight of Allah is not the bulk of the deed but the truth of the heart behind it. You do not need a chief's lineage or a perfect life to remember your Lord. You need only a corner, a few moments at dawn, and a tongue that says His praise. She left us the very words. To say them is to walk, for a moment, in the footsteps of a woman who sat in her small place of worship until the morning was full of light, and to inherit, across all these centuries, a share of her reward.

So carry one thing of hers into your ordinary day. Meet a loss without complaint and trust that Allah is arranging what you cannot see. Loosen your grip on one comfort and give it for His sake, with no one watching. And say, at dawn and at dusk, the

remembrance she carried to us, glory be to Allah and praise be to Him, as many as His creation, as much as pleases Him, as heavy as His throne, as endless as His words. May Allah be pleased with our mother Juwayriya, who came in chains and became a blessing to her people and to us, and may He make us, like her, among the men and women who remember Him often.

This chapter follows the account of Juwayriya bint al-Harith (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (33:35). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Zaynab bint Jahsh

The Longest Arm

She was born at the very top of Makkah, a daughter of one of its wealthiest houses, with nobility on both sides and beauty and standing besides. She had every reason to spend her life in the comfort she was born into. Instead, by the end of it, money could not stay in her hand any longer than a burning coal stays in an open palm. She gave it all away, furniture and grave-cloth and the last coins of her allowance, until she died owning almost nothing. Her sisters in faith remembered her by one phrase the Prophet ﷺ had given them, a phrase that had once sounded like a riddle and turned out to be a promise: the longest arm.

Her name was Zaynab bint Jahsh, and her life is one of the clearest pictures we have of what nearness to the Prophet ﷺ could do to a human heart.

A daughter of the elite

Zaynab (may Allah be pleased with her) was born about seventeen years before the revelation, into a family at the summit of Makkan society. Her father came from a noble and wealthy line. Her mother was an aunt of the Prophet ﷺ himself, so that Zaynab carried the blood of the Prophet's own house. She had wealth, beauty, prestige, and prominence, everything the rigid classism of Makkah taught people to prize. She came from the top of the top of the top.

And from that house, child after child walked into Islam. Her brother Abdullah ibn Jahsh embraced the faith early and became the first commander the Prophet ﷺ ever appointed over a fighting party. He was martyred at Uhud and buried in a single grave with his maternal uncle, Hamza. Another brother, Abu Ahmad, was blind, and his blindness never once held him back. Anything that could be carried, he asked to carry; anywhere he could stand, he stood. His home in Makkah was stolen from him when he became Muslim, and he used to grieve over it, until he was reassured that Allah would give him in its place a house in Paradise. He outlived all his siblings and would one day bury Zaynab herself.

This was the family Zaynab came from: people who heard the call and gave everything to it. Her own first name, the historians tell us, was Darwa, a name that claimed purity. The Prophet ﷺ changed it, as he changed several such names, because a person should not claim purity for themselves, and he gave her instead the name Zaynab, the name of a fragrant plant whose scent grows stronger as it grows older. It was a name he loved. It became, through her and others, one of the most cherished names in the whole community. And in her case the meaning held: the older her faith grew, the more its fragrance spread.

The marriage that broke a wall

When her family migrated to Madinah, Zaynab carried an expectation with her. She was waiting, in her heart, for the Prophet ﷺ to come and propose to her. It was not vanity. By the cold arithmetic of lineage, no one else in the city was noble enough to marry a woman like her. He alone had the nobility of birth, and he was the Prophet of Allah and the head of the

community besides. She assumed, reasonably, that he would come for her.

And one day he did come to her house. Her sister Hamna was there, and the family was glad, and Zaynab was glad, certain the proposal she had waited for had arrived. Then the Prophet ﷺ said he had come on behalf of Zayd ibn Harithah.

Zayd was a freed slave. In the social order Zaynab had been raised inside, he stood at the opposite end of everything she represented, and that distance was exactly the point. The Prophet ﷺ was deliberately reaching across the lines his society had drawn and refused to question. He had done it before and would do it again, joining the high to the low until the wall itself cracked. The family recoiled. Marry our noble daughter to a freed slave? How could it be done?

It was in this moment that Allah revealed the verse that settled the matter:

When God and His Messenger have decided on a matter that concerns them, it is not fitting for any believing man or woman to claim freedom of choice in that matter: whoever disobeys God and His Messenger is far astray.

QUR'AN 33:36

And here the first quality of Zaynab shows itself, beneath the disappointment. She did not cling to her own preference. She sent word back to the Prophet ﷺ: I believe in Allah, I believe in the Messenger, I seek Allah's forgiveness, and whatever you see as fitting, I will carry it out. She married Zayd.

It did not work. They came from two entirely different worlds, and the gap between those worlds never closed. There were different habits, different ways, a lingering resentment that the marriage

was not the one she had hoped for. It simply was not coming together. In time Zayd went to the Prophet ﷺ and asked to divorce her, and the Prophet ﷺ told him to hold on to his wife and to be mindful of Allah, to try to work through it. But the differences would not resolve.

The wisdom Allah was unfolding

What happened next has been twisted by people hostile to the Prophet ﷺ into something ugly, and it is worth being clear about, because the truth is more dignified than the slander.

The hostile version claims that the Prophet ﷺ saw Zaynab one day, was struck by her, and concealed a private love until events forced a divorce. It collapses the moment you look at it. The verse of hijab had not yet been revealed, so there was nothing hidden to glimpse. And Zaynab had wanted to marry him from the very beginning; if he had wished it, he could have married her at the start and spared himself the entire ordeal, and no one would have objected. A man does not engineer years of difficulty to obtain something freely available to him from the first day.

The thing the Prophet ﷺ was concealing, the secret Allah said He would bring into the open, was not a feeling. It was a command. Allah had made known to him that Zayd would divorce Zaynab and that he, the Prophet ﷺ, would then marry her, and he dreaded what people would say, because Zayd had been raised in his household as an adopted son. Allah was telling him not to fear the people in a matter Allah had already decreed.

And the wisdom of that decree was enormous. In that society, adoption did not mean what it means to us. An adopted son was treated as a true son in law: he could inherit his adoptive father's wife after death, even without her consent; the institution was

used to seize the wealth of orphans and to conceal sins. It was, at best, a hollow custom and, at worst, a tool of oppression. To abolish something so entrenched, the change had to be modeled in the life of the Prophet ﷺ himself. By marrying the former wife of the man the people called his son, he severed the false fiction at its root. Allah declared it plainly:

Muhammad is not the father of any one of you men; he is God's Messenger and the seal of the prophets: God knows everything.

QUR'AN 33:40

There were further mercies folded inside this. Because the Prophet ﷺ had no surviving biological son, no one could ever claim prophethood or rule on the basis of being his heir, and that door was closed before it could open. And Zayd, who lost the honour of being called the son of Muhammad, was compensated with something no other companion ever received: his name was placed in the Qur'an itself, recited as worship by the believers until the end of time. The annulment of false adoption did not abandon orphans. It freed their genuine care from a corrupt frame, and the verses that followed urged the community to take them in, to foster and raise and protect them, in a civilization that had once buried its children alive.

So Allah brought about the divorce, and then commanded the marriage. When the word reached Zaynab, she fell into prostration. This was what she had wanted from the start, given to her now from above. She used to say, with a kind of awe that her co-wives knew well, that her marriage was unlike any other in history: their families had married them off, but Allah had married her from above the seven heavens. There had been no human guardian and no human witnesses; the Qur'an itself was her

marriage contract. She counted three gifts: that Allah was her guardian, that Allah was the One who married her off, and that the verses of hijab were revealed in connection with her. The Prophet ﷺ celebrated that wedding with a generosity rare in those lean years. He slaughtered an animal and fed the people bread and meat until there was food left over.

The veil, and the household

It was on the day of her wedding that the verse of hijab came down, the curtain that would separate the chambers of the Prophet's ﷺ wives from the people who came to visit. The story behind it is quietly tender. Guests had come to eat and, after the meal, lingered and kept talking. The Prophet ﷺ was too modest to ask them to leave. So he rose and went out himself, hoping they would follow; he walked to the rooms of his other wives, greeted each of them, made supplication for them and they for him, and came back, and the guests were still sitting there. Out of that moment of his shyness, Allah set the boundary that would shape how his household met the world.

Zaynab's place in that household was vivid and human. She and our mother Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) were the two who most often clashed, and the clashes are recorded honestly. Zaynab would say with pride that Allah had married her off from above His throne; Aisha would answer that her own family had married her, and the two would go back and forth. There was the time she snapped harshly at another of the wives over her background, and the Prophet ﷺ was so displeased that he did not speak to Zaynab for a while. She had a temper. The histories do not hide it.

But here is what makes her greatness real rather than decorative: even in conflict, she would not cross into sin. When the terrible

slander against Aisha spread through Madinah, and the Prophet ﷺ asked Zaynab what she knew, Zaynab had every worldly motive to wound a rival. She refused. She said she would guard her hearing and her sight; she knew nothing of Aisha but good. Aisha herself, who had no reason to flatter her, said that Allah protected Zaynab through her piety, that she had too much consciousness of Allah to take part in the lie. A woman who would argue with you over a tent, but would not slander you when slander was handed to her on a plate, is a woman whose fear of Allah was real.

What four years did to a heart

This is the turn in her story, and it is the part worth slowing down for.

Aisha, her own rival, gave Zaynab one of the highest tributes one believer has ever paid another. She said she had never met a woman better in her religion than Zaynab, none more conscious of Allah, more truthful in speech, more devoted to the ties of kinship, more generous in charity, more willing to give of herself and draw nearer to Allah through it. Every box, Aisha said, Zaynab filled.

Think about who this woman had been. Royalty, raised in wealth and ease at the top of Makkah. And then watch what nearness to the Prophet ﷺ did to her in only a handful of years. There is a description from her brother Abdullah that captures what it was like to be near that light: when we were with the Prophet ﷺ, he said, all we cared about was the Hereafter, and this world meant nothing to us. The material world simply lost its weight. That is what happened inside Zaynab.

One day the Prophet ﷺ entered the mosque and saw a rope hanging between two pillars. He asked what it was. They told him it was Zaynab's rope: she came to the mosque at night and prayed until, overcome by exhaustion, she would lean on the rope to keep standing. He told them to take it down. He said a person should pray as long as they have the energy and the alertness to understand what they are reading, and when tiredness takes that away, they should sit and rest. He corrected the method gently, but the rope tells you everything about the heart behind it. The woman who had once been the elite of Makkah was now in the mosque at night, holding herself up on a cord so she could keep praying.

After the Prophet ﷺ passed away, it was said of Zaynab that she barely left her home, that she spent her days and her nights between the Qur'an and worship as though nothing else in the world existed. She became an ascetic in the deepest sense, devoted, withdrawn, hard for the rest of society to even comprehend: how had this woman of royalty become so detached, so absorbed in the worship of Allah?

And there was the charity. They said money in the hand of Zaynab was like charcoal, that whatever touched her hand left it just as quickly. When the second caliph sent the yearly allowances to the wives of the Prophet ﷺ, he was told that Zaynab kept none of hers; it all went out the door. She begged Allah not to let her live to see another year of such money, because she felt it was a trial for her. When her share was brought, she divided it on the spot. The books of seerah describe her as racing to give, so eager that the gift was out the door to meet the one who came for it before they could even reach her.

The longest arm

The wives of the Prophet ﷺ were preoccupied, after his death, with a single question: which of them would be the first to follow him? He had told them that the one with the longest arm would be the first to join him. So whenever they gathered, they would stretch out their arms and measure them against one another, longing not for life but for reunion. That was the mindset he had left in the people who loved him: they measured their arms, hoping to be the first to go to him.

Zaynab was among the shortest of them. By the measuring of arms, the tall and elderly Sawdah seemed the likeliest to be first. But it was Zaynab who died first, and only then did they understand. The longest arm was never about the body. It was about the hand that reaches farthest in giving, and no one among them gave like Zaynab. Hers was the longest arm.

She had prepared for her death as carefully as she had prepared for her prayers. She told those around her that she had already made ready her own burial shroud, and that the caliph would surely send cloth for her; if he did, she said, give it away, and give away whatever of my preparation is not strictly needed to lay me in the grave. She wanted nothing to leave this world with her but the bare necessity of burial. She had even given away her furniture. The woman who had been counted among the elite of Makkah had refashioned herself, through something that took root in her heart, into the elite of the Hereafter.

Her funeral was an event in Madinah, for she was the first of the Prophet's ﷺ wives to pass after him, the first of the Mothers of the Believers to go. The people prayed over her in his mosque and waited around her house. Her blind brother Abu Ahmad, the one who had outlived them all, would not leave her bedside; he held on and wept, and the people had to gently help him let her

go. Through this woman, he said, every blessing that ever came to our household came to us. It was a windy day, so Asma bint Umayy, who washed her body, suggested they place a cover over the bier, because Zaynab had been a woman of deep modesty and they would not let the wind expose her. They held a sheet over the grave as she was lowered into it, and from that day the people of Madinah took it as their practice: when a woman is buried, a sheet is held over the grave so that nothing of her is seen. They call it the way of Zaynab.

The longest-living wife of the Prophet ﷺ, hearing of her death, remembered all the old arguments and let them fall away. She asked Allah to have mercy on her and called her a beloved and righteous woman who prayed by night and fasted by day and gave all her wealth to the poor. She was, they said, the shelter of the widows and the orphans of Madinah.

What Zaynab's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read Zaynab's life as a story about a great woman and stop there. That would be to miss what it is actually for. Her life is not a portrait to admire from a distance. It is a question asked directly of your own iman.

Begin where she began. She had her plan, her preference, her certainty about how her life should go, and when the answer came back as Zayd instead of the Prophet ﷺ, she did not get the thing she wanted. And she submitted anyway. I believe in Allah, I believe in His Messenger, whatever you see as fitting I will carry out. That is the first thing her life asks of you: when Allah's decree cuts across the plan you were sure was right, can you hand the plan back to Him? Most of us treat submission as something we offer once we agree with the outcome. Zaynab submitted before she could see the wisdom, and the wisdom

came later, far larger than the marriage she had wanted. Trust like that is not weakness. It is the deepest strength a believer has, the willingness to let Allah be wiser than you about your own life.

Then look at what four years near the Prophet ﷺ did to her, because that is the heart of it. She did not start as the woman with the rope in the mosque. She started as royalty, with a temper, with rivalries, with all the ordinary weight of a privileged life. And being near the light of revelation slowly emptied this world of its grip on her, until money would not stay in her hand and the night was for standing in prayer. You will not sit with the Prophet ﷺ in this life. But you can sit with his Qur'an, you can keep the company of those who remind you of Allah, you can place yourself again and again in the light until it does to you what it did to her. The transformation was not magic. It was proximity. Choose, today, what your heart stays close to.

And consider the longest arm, because it reframes everything you think you own. Zaynab gave until there was nothing left, not out of carelessness but because she had understood that what you keep, you lose, and what you give for Allah, you keep forever. She did not give for thanks; she begged Allah to spare her the very wealth that might distract her heart. That is ikhlas, charity for the sake of Allah alone, the hand reaching out the door before anyone can even knock. You do not need to give away your furniture. The Prophet ﷺ himself restrained the companions from emptying their homes. But her life asks the honest question underneath the amount: when you give, whose eyes are you giving for? Could you give one thing this week that no one will ever know about, the way she gave, so that the only One who sees it is the only One whose seeing matters?

Here is what should lift your heart. The world looked at Zaynab and saw a noblewoman who had given her fortune away and died owning nothing. Heaven looked at the same woman and saw the longest arm, the first of the Mothers of the Believers to follow the Prophet ﷺ, the shelter of the orphans and widows of Madinah. What the streets called loss, Allah was recording as the truest kind of wealth. Nothing she gave for His sake was ever gone. It had simply moved ahead of her, and was waiting.

So take one thing from her into your ordinary days. Loosen your grip on a plan you have been clutching, and let Allah be wiser than you. Keep your heart close to what raises it, the Qur'an, the remembrance, the company that points to Allah. And let one act of giving slip quietly out of your hand for His sake alone, expecting nothing back from anyone but Him. That is how a daughter of the Makkan elite became the longest arm. The road she walked is still open. May Allah be pleased with Zaynab bint Jahsh, lengthen our reach in giving for His sake, and gather us in the company of the Mothers of the Believers.

This chapter follows the account of Zaynab bint Jahsh (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (33:36, 33:40). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Hafsa bint Umar

Saved by Devotion

There is a kind of greatness that fills a room and a kind that empties one to go and stand alone before Allah. Hafsa bint Umar (may Allah be pleased with her) belonged to the second kind. She was the daughter of one of the strongest men this religion has ever known, the wife of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and a keeper of the very pages of the Qur'an. Yet when you go looking for her in the books, you do not find a woman who shaped the public life of Madinah from the front. You find a woman who fasted in the daylight and stood in prayer through the night, year after quiet year, until the One she stood for sent word, through revelation itself, that she was His Prophet's wife in Paradise.

Her story is the story of what devotion is worth when no one is watching.

Daughter of a noble house

She was born about five years before prophethood, around the year 605, into one of the earliest families of Islam. Her father was Umar ibn al-Khattab, and her mother was Zaynab bint Maz'un, sister of Uthman ibn Maz'un, one of the first to believe and the first migrant to be buried in Madinah. This was a household where faith came early and ran deep.

Hafsa was the eldest child. Her full brother was Abdullah ibn Umar, and after him came a brother their father named Abdul

Rahman, because Umar had heard the Prophet ﷺ say that the most beloved of names to Allah are Abdullah and Abdul Rahman, and he wanted to act on what he heard. That instinct, to hear a word of guidance and immediately build a life around it, ran in the family. Hafsa inherited it more fully than anyone.

It is worth pausing to clear away a story sometimes told, that Umar buried daughters alive in the days of ignorance and wept over it later. Dr. Omar Suleiman is clear that this is a fabrication. Hafsa was his eldest, and she lived. He had another daughter whose name carried the meaning of disobedience, and the Prophet ﷺ renamed her Jamila. A man who buried his daughters does not raise two of them in the light of Islam.

What is true is that Hafsa was, in the deepest sense, her father's child. She had his God-consciousness, his taqwa, his fierce inward seriousness about the next world. Umar's two most prominent children, Hafsa and Abdullah, were each a copy of him: Abdullah clinging to the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ in every footstep, and Hafsa carrying her father's devotion in worship. She took the best of what he had, and she lived it.

A widow of Badr

Most scholars hold that Hafsa embraced Islam before her father did. Her first husband was Khunays ibn Hudhafa, counted among the first twenty people to accept Islam, a man so early that he believed before the Muslims even began to gather in the house of al-Arqam. He and his family bore the persecution of Makkah, migrated to Abyssinia to escape it, and later made the hijra to Madinah.

Khunays was the only man of his clan to fight at Badr, and it is one of the things he is remembered for. He was wounded, and

not long after, most likely after the battle itself, he died of those wounds, and was buried beside Uthman ibn Maz'un, the first migrant laid in the graveyard of Madinah. Hafsa and Khunays had no children, and now, still young, she found herself a widow in a new city, wondering what her life would hold.

What happened next is one of the most human passages in all the seerah, and it tells you as much about the men around her as about Hafsa herself. Her father set out to find her a husband. He went first to Uthman ibn Affan, who had just lost his own wife, the Prophet's daughter Ruqayyah, on the very day the news of Badr's victory reached Madinah. To Umar it made perfect sense: a generous, shy, righteous man, recently widowed, for his recently widowed daughter. He offered Hafsa to Uthman. Uthman asked for time, and then quietly declined.

Umar was wounded by it. He went next to Abu Bakr, the greatest of men after the Prophet ﷺ, and offered Hafsa to him. Abu Bakr, who was famously eloquent, said nothing at all. He stayed silent until Umar walked away, and Umar left more upset than before. At least Uthman had given him a word. Abu Bakr had given him only silence.

So Umar carried his hurt to the Prophet ﷺ himself, half to complain about his two friends. And the Prophet ﷺ answered with words that turned everything: Hafsa would marry someone better than Uthman, and Uthman someone better than Hafsa. The Prophet ﷺ would marry Hafsa, and give his own daughter Umm Kulthum to Uthman. Umar's grief broke into joy. He said, "Allahu Akbar." He was about to be bound to the Prophet ﷺ by family, the most beloved thing in the world to him.

Only later did he understand the silence. Abu Bakr and Uthman asked if he was still angry, and explained: the Prophet ﷺ had

already mentioned Hafsa to them in confidence. They had stayed silent not out of disregard but to protect his secret. Abu Bakr told him plainly that nothing would have honored him more than to marry Umar's daughter, but he could not betray what the Messenger ﷺ had entrusted to him. The marriage took place around three years after the hijra, in the month of Sha'ban.

Two daughters of two friends

With this marriage, the closest circle around the Prophet ﷺ became a single family. He was now married to the daughters of his two dearest companions, Aisha the daughter of Abu Bakr and Hafsa the daughter of Umar, the two men he had once called his hearing and his sight. Uthman was married to his daughter, and Ali to his daughter Fatima. The bonds of the new community in Madinah were knit tight.

Aisha and Hafsa became close, as their fathers were close, near in age and near in spirit, and the friendship had its lighter moments. Once on a journey they switched their mounts as a prank, and the Prophet ﷺ, not knowing, walked alongside the wrong camel. And there was the day they agreed together on what to say to him about the honey he had eaten in another household, a small conspiracy of wives that the Qur'an itself would later address.

There is a tender scene from those years that catches who Hafsa was. She and Aisha were keeping a voluntary fast, and the Prophet ﷺ lived in such poverty that hunger was constant. Some food came while they were starving, and they broke the fast and ate. Then came the worry: they had deliberately broken a fast, and they did not know the ruling. Aisha, eloquent like her father, rushed to tell the Prophet ﷺ the moment he arrived, her conscience unable to hold it. He reassured them gently: make up

the day, and do not worry. From this the scholars drew that breaking a voluntary fast carries no sin, only a make-up if one wishes. But notice the heart underneath the question. These were women who took the breaking of even an optional fast seriously enough to fear it.

The woman who fasted and prayed

Hafsa was not a public figure in the way Aisha was. She did not teach great gatherings or move through the affairs of the community. Her life turned inward, toward Allah. In the house of the Prophet ﷺ she took on his way of worship and made it her own: standing in prayer at night, fasting through the days, binding herself to the recitation of the Qur'an and to his abstinence from this world. If you had met Hafsa, this is what you would have found her doing, and she is remembered, like her father, as a woman of taqwa, the one who fasts and the one who prays.

Her closeness to the Prophet ﷺ also gave her family access to him. Her brother Abdullah, a righteous young man who spent his time in the mosque, once longed for a good dream he could share, for the Prophet ﷺ used to invite people after Fajr to tell their dreams so he could give them glad tidings. Instead Abdullah saw two angels take him to the edge of the Fire, where he saw people he recognized, and he cried out for refuge in Allah, until an angel told him this was not his place and led him away. Too shy to ask the Prophet ﷺ directly, he went to his sister. She put the dream to the Prophet ﷺ, and his answer came back through her: "What a good young man Abdullah is, if only he would pray a little at night." Abdullah heard it, and from then on he slept very little. The advice passed through Hafsa, and she was already living its meaning in her own nights.

Almost everything Hafsa narrated has to do with worship. She has only about sixty narrations, far fewer than Aisha, and nearly all describe the ibada of the Prophet ﷺ. She was asked once what his bed was like, the bed of the most powerful man in Arabia. She said it was a single piece of woolen cloth they would fold in two to sleep on. One night she folded it into four, to give him a softer rest. He slept, and in the morning he told her to fold it back as it was, because the comfort had made him slower to rise for the night prayer. Even her kindness, he gently turned back toward standing before Allah.

She watched his recitation more closely than almost anyone. She said she never saw him pray his night prayer sitting until the last year of his life, and that when he recited he was slow and measured, every letter distinct. When age and exhaustion finally bent him to pray sitting, he lengthened his recitation, as if to make up in depth what he had lost in posture. When people asked her to describe it, she recited for them from behind a curtain, pausing after each verse, the way he used to stop and supplicate and weep between the verses at night. She wanted them to understand that they could never match it.

Hafsa herself memorized the entire Qur'an, rare for anyone in those years, man or woman. She learned to read and write at a time when literacy was uncommon, taught by a woman named al-Shifa bint Abdullah, skilled in reading, writing, and medicine. The picture this leaves is plain: a household where a woman was taught to read, to write, and to hold the whole Book in her heart.

The verses that touched her home

The Qur'an did not pass over Hafsa's house. Some of what she narrated is itself commentary on the Book. She once asked the Prophet ﷺ about those who had given the pledge under the tree,

the pledge of Ridwan, after he said none of them would enter the Fire. She raised the verse that troubled her, that every soul would come to the Fire, and he answered with the verse that follows it, that Allah saves the devout. Listen to the words she was weighing:

but every single one of you will approach it, a decree from your Lord which must be fulfilled. We shall save the devout and leave the evildoers there on their knees.

QUR'AN 19:71-72

This was the kind of woman she was: a wife of the Prophet ﷺ who sat with the Book, weighing one verse against another, asking until the meaning was clear.

The most searching test of her marriage also came through revelation. There came a season when the Prophet ﷺ withdrew from his wives and gave them a choice between the ease of this world and the reward of the next, after words had passed in his household that displeased him. Umar, ever the protective father, had already warned Hafsa not to ask too much of the Prophet ﷺ, not to raise her voice, never to desert him, and not to imagine herself the equal of Aisha. When the rumor swept through Madinah that the Prophet ﷺ had divorced his wives, Umar's neighbor came pounding on his door in the night. Umar dressed, prayed Fajr, and found Hafsa weeping. He did not yet know what had happened, and neither did she.

He went to the Prophet ﷺ, who was secluded in an upper room, and was twice turned away through Bilal before he was let in. He found the most powerful man in Arabia lying on a mat of woven palm fibers that had pressed their marks into his side, in a room that held almost nothing of value. Umar asked directly: had he

divorced his wives? The Prophet ﷺ said no. And the conversation turned from a father's fear into something far larger, Umar marveling that a man who could have ruled like Persia and Rome owned nothing, and the Prophet ﷺ asking whether he was not pleased that the others should have this passing world while they had the Hereafter. The verse of that episode named the two wives gently and held out the door of return:

If both of you [wives] repent to God - for your hearts have deviated - [all will be well]; if you collaborate against him, [be warned that] God will aid him, as will Gabriel and all righteous believers, and the angels too will back him.

QUR'AN 66:4

Hafsa took up the rest of the story herself. She was weeping, not knowing her fate, when the Prophet ﷺ came to her. He told her, "Take back Hafsa, for she is a woman who fasts and a woman who prays, and she is your wife in Paradise." The scholars note what this means. The intercession on her behalf did not come because she was Umar's daughter. It came because she fasted and she prayed. Her name was abundant in the heavens because of the nights she stood and the days she went hungry for Allah. Heaven knew her by her devotion. The very advice she had once carried to her brother, "if only he would pray a little at night," she had been quietly living all along.

After the Messenger of Allah

When the Prophet ﷺ lay dying, the small possessions of that household became relics of love. Hafsa kept the brass tub in which he was bathed to cool the heat of his fever in his final days. Like her father, she was undone by his death, and chose a

quiet life after it, the kind some companions chose, withdrawing to wait for the day they would meet him again.

There is a scene between Hafsa and her father that holds them both. Umar was now the leader of the believers, walking about in a patched garment, the poverty still visible on him. Hafsa asked him gently why he did not wear something finer, easier on himself. He answered by asking her to remember how her husband, the Prophet ﷺ, used to dress, the hardness of the life he lived. The two of them wept and embraced. She was known for this, weeping when good food was set before her because the Prophet ﷺ had never had it.

She is the one who preserved her father's strange and beautiful supplication. She used to hear Umar pray to be granted martyrdom in the path of Allah, and to die in the city of His Prophet ﷺ. She asked him how that could possibly happen, when martyrdom belonged to distant battlefields and Madinah was a place of safety. He told her Allah would bring it about if He willed; his part was only to ask sincerely. And it happened. Umar was stabbed while leading the prayer in the mosque of the Prophet ﷺ, and Hafsa wept so loudly at his side that the companions tried to calm her. Even then, with his wounds open and his life leaving him, her father turned her back toward the Sunnah, reminding her not to wail, for the dead are pained by it. His last lesson to his daughter was his whole life in miniature: hold to what the Prophet ﷺ taught, even now.

After Umar, Hafsa carried a trust that belonged to no one else. The compiled pages of the Qur'an, the mushaf, were kept in her house. When Uthman undertook to make the standard copies, he borrowed that compilation from Hafsa, made the copies, and

returned it to her. The Book that the whole ummah would recite passed through her keeping.

And she kept her father's other habit too. Umar would not eat a meal without an orphan at his table, and Hafsa made her home a place for orphans, raising among them a daughter of Zayd. She spent the rest of her life as she had spent her best years, in worship, in fasting, in the recitation of the Qur'an, until by the end it was as though she fasted every day. When the great civil strife came, she stayed entirely out of it. Urged toward the conflict that led to the Battle of the Camel, she declined on her brother Abdullah's counsel, and afterward she would say, with relief, that she had never dipped her hand in any of it.

She died around the year 45 after the hijra, and her brother Abdullah lowered her body into the grave. There is a quiet wonder in where her life is anchored still: when a visitor stands today at the resting place of the Prophet ﷺ to give him salaam, he stands in what was once the house of Hafsa, the home of a woman who asked for so little of this world and was given Paradise.

What Hafsa's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read of the wives of the Prophet ﷺ and feel their rank is so far above us that they have nothing to ask of an ordinary believer. Hafsa's life refuses that distance. She was returned to her marriage, and named a dweller of Paradise, not for her lineage and not for her nearness to power, but for two things any of us can do: she fasted, and she prayed. The door she walked through is still open.

So begin with sincerity. The most striking thing about Hafsa is how little of her reached the public eye. She did not teach the

crowds or steer the community. She stood at night when the house was dark and fasted through days no one counted, and Allah counted every one of them, until her name was abundant in the heavens. That is ikhlas, worship offered to Allah alone, in the hours when no human being is watching and there is nothing to gain but His pleasure. Ask yourself how much of your worship would survive if no one ever knew of it. Hers was almost all of that kind, and it was exactly that kind that Heaven recorded. You can pray two units tonight that no one will ever hear about, and fast a day next week that you mention to no one, and know that the same Lord who knew Hafsa's nights knows yours.

Then take her devotion and make it ordinary. She performed no extraordinary feats. She built a quiet, repeated, lifelong habit: the night prayer, the regular fast, time with the Qur'an, until at the end it was simply who she was. Faith is rarely raised by a single grand act; it is raised by small acts of worship done for Allah, again and again, until they become the shape of a person. Choose one, and keep it. A portion of the night, a verse held in the heart, a fast on a Monday. Keep it for Allah until it becomes you.

And learn her contentment. Hafsa wept over good food and fine clothes because she remembered a beloved man who had neither, and her measure of success was never what she owned. When loss came, the loss of her first husband at Badr, of the Messenger ﷺ, of her father stabbed before her eyes, she grieved, but she did not turn bitter against the decree of Allah. Her peace was never in her circumstances. It was in her Lord. When hardship reaches your own life, her example asks whether your contentment can rest where hers did, in Allah and not in what He gives or takes.

The world remembered her as a footnote beside her famous father and her famous co-wife. Allah remembered her as a woman who fasts and a woman who prays, and His Messenger ﷺ told her, while she wept in fear, that she would be his wife in Paradise. That is the trade her life holds out to us: spend yourself quietly for Allah, ask little of this world, and let Him keep the record. May Allah be pleased with Hafsa bint Umar, raise us upon a measure of her devotion, and let our nights and our fasts be counted, as hers were, in the heavens.

This chapter follows the account of Hafsa bint Umar (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (19:71-72, 66:4). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Aisha bint Abu Bakr

The Mother of the Believers

When the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ passed away in her room, with his head against her chest, Aisha bint Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with her) was about twenty years old. She would live for another fifty years. Almost everyone who studies her thinks first of that one decade she spent as his wife. But the larger part of her life, by far, came after he was gone. And what she did with those five decades is its own kind of love story. She did not spend them mourning a man she had lost. She spent them carrying him forward, teaching from the same house she had shared with him, until the whole ummah came to know the Prophet ﷺ through her eyes.

To understand her later life, you have to understand what she had been promised, and what she chose to do with it.

The home where the moons were buried

The angel Jibril had once come to the Prophet ﷺ and told him that Aisha would be his wife in this world and in Paradise. She was the only wife other than Khadijah to whom Jibril sent his salaam. As the Prophet ﷺ lay dying, Allah comforted him with one more sign about her: he said that he had been shown Aisha in Paradise, that he was shown the palm of her hand, so that his death would be made easier for him. He was being told, as he parted from this world, that the people he loved most would

follow him. And she was being told that this separation was only the temporary parting of one life, that the reunion was certain. That single promise would nourish her for fifty years.

She had once seen a dream, before any of it happened, that three moons fell into her home. After the Prophet ﷺ was buried in her room, her father Abu Bakr came to her and reminded her of it. He told her that the three best people on the earth would be buried in her house, and that this, the Prophet ﷺ, was the best of her three moons. Imagine living in that house. She had waited there, year after year, for him to come home. Now his body rested beside her. Every time she taught a hadith about him, and she narrated over two thousand of them, she was sitting beside his grave. Every time she relived his final moments, they were right there, a few feet away.

Then the second moon. Abu Bakr, her father, became the leader of the Muslims, and when his own death drew near, on a Monday, at sixty-three, he asked her how old the Prophet ﷺ had been when he died. Sixty-three, she said. On what day? A Monday. What was he wearing? She told him. And Abu Bakr dressed himself in those same simple cloths, lay down, and waited for death to come so that he could be buried at the shoulder of the Prophet ﷺ. She walked into that room and found her father gone, the second moon laid to rest beside the first.

The grave she gave away

She had prepared herself, by now, for her own death. She assumed, naturally, that she would be the one buried beside the Prophet ﷺ and her father. There was no reason to think otherwise. It would have taken something extraordinary to change it.

Something extraordinary happened. Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), stabbed and dying, sent his son Abdullah to Aisha with a request: that he be allowed to be buried beside the Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr. The three of them had walked together through Medina all their lives. It seemed only right that they rest together. But listen to how Umar framed it. Do not pressure her, he told his son. Make it only a request. Ask if she is sure, and if she says yes, leave, and then come back and ask her again, in case she only agreed out of emotion and might change her mind.

When Abdullah came with the request, Aisha said something that should not be passed over quickly. She said, "I wanted that grave for myself. But today I will prefer Umar over myself." She gave it up. Years earlier, when she lay beside the Prophet ﷺ and he asked her permission to rise and pray in the night, she had told him, "I love your closeness, but I love more what makes you happy." This was the same heart, only now the consequences would last forever, not one night. She knew how much the Prophet ﷺ had loved Umar, and so she preferred Umar's nearness over her own. To prefer what pleased the Prophet ﷺ was, for her, to prefer what pleased Allah. So Umar was buried at the shoulder of Abu Bakr, and after that, when Aisha entered that room, she would wear her hijab, out of modesty before Umar, even though he had died. And Allah preserved her in a way no grave could. She is not buried beside the Prophet ﷺ, and yet she is inseparable from him. We cannot remember him without her.

A worship that mirrored his

Before anything is said about her teaching, something must be said about her own worship, because that is where her knowledge lived first. Her nephew Urwah ibn Zubair, who learned

more from her than almost anyone, did not begin his praise of her with her scholarship. He said that no one's prayer resembled the prayer of the Prophet ﷺ more than Aisha's. He did not only mean the shape of it, the way she stood and bowed and prostrated, though she had watched him pray countless times. He meant the awe in it, the stillness, the humility before Allah.

She would begin reciting the Qur'an in the depth of the night and continue, with only a pause for fajr, until well after sunrise. Urwah described coming to ask her a question once and finding her standing in prayer, repeating a single verse from Surat al-Tur, weeping and making supplication, then reciting it again and weeping again:

God has been gracious to us and saved us from the torment of intense heat-

QUR'AN 52:27

He grew tired of waiting. He left to do his shopping in the marketplace, came home, put away what he had bought, and returned, and she was in the exact same place, reciting the exact same verse, still crying, still calling on her Lord. She fasted so constantly that those close to her said it was as if she fasted without end. She prayed like him, recited like him, fasted as he had taught. But of all her acts of worship, the one people remembered most was her charity.

Everything in her hands she gave away

It is narrated that Aisha never ate a full meal without crying. When they asked her why, she said she could not eat to her fill without remembering the state in which the Prophet ﷺ had left this world. She swore that he never once, in his whole life, ate his

fill of bread or meat twice in a single day. So while other companions grieved friends who had died young, she grieved that the man she loved most had never eaten the food now placed before her. And so she refused to let her own life rise above the way she had lived with him. For fifty years after his death, she stayed poor by choice. People tried again and again to change that. They could not.

Mu'awiya once sent her a hundred thousand dirhams, enough to keep her comfortable for years. It arrived before noon, and she was fasting. By the time the fast ended, she did not have a single dirham left of it; she had given all of it away, and had nothing for her own iftar. Another time she received a hundred thousand dirhams and divided the whole sum among the other wives of the Prophet ﷺ, keeping nothing. A man came once carrying seventy thousand dirhams, wrapped up, anonymous, and when asked who he was he would say only, "Someone who loves the Messenger of Allah ﷺ." She gave it all away that same day.

There is a story from Barirah, the freed servant who stayed at Aisha's side for the rest of her life. The two of them were fasting, and a beggar came to the door. Barirah told him truthfully there was nothing in the house. But Aisha said she thought there might be something, and she searched the cupboards until she found a single cup of barley, the very barley they had set aside for their own iftar. She brought it out and gave it to the beggar. Barirah was annoyed, and teased her, wondering aloud whether their food would now fall from the sky. That evening they broke their fast with water and prayed, and as soon as they finished, someone knocked: a cooked goat had been prepared for the family of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Aisha looked at Barirah and gently repeated her own words back to her, the bit about food falling from the sky, and then told her, "When you trust Allah

more than you trust what is in your possession, Allah will provide for you."

Once a beggar came and she could find only a single grape to give him. The man looked at it, this one grape, and said, "That's it?" And Aisha answered with a verse, asking him how many atoms' weight of good were in that grape:

whoever has done an atom's-weight of good will see it,

QUR'AN 99:7

It might look like nothing to you, she meant, but I hope from Allah that it is something great. She even understood charity at a level most people never reach. When she sent food to families she knew were in need, she would ask the messenger who returned what they had said, and specifically whether they had made du'a for her. If they had, she asked him to tell her the exact words, so that she could make the same du'a back for them, because Allah says of the righteous that they feed others seeking neither recompense nor thanks. She did not want even their gratitude to lessen her reward; she wanted the full weight of the charity to remain with Allah alone.

The teacher who raised orphans into scholars

Her house, even after the Prophet's death, stayed full of orphans. She fed them and raised them, but she gave them something rarer than food. In a society where most adults could not read or write, Aisha taught her orphans to read and write, taught them Arabic poetry and grammar, and was so exacting that she would correct a single mistake. She knew that orphans were so often exploited precisely because they were left without learning, and so she raised hers to be literate, even to become scholars. When

a girl among them was ready, Aisha would arrange her marriage and sponsor her all the way to the wedding. The Prophet ﷺ had said that he and the one who cares for an orphan would be together in Paradise like two fingers held side by side. Aisha, already closer to him than that, lived it out with complete excellence.

And then there was her knowledge, which towered. She was one of the few companions counted as a true mufti, issuing verdicts to the generation after the Prophet ﷺ. Up to seventy female students would gather in her home. When she traveled, it was as though a university traveled with her. On Hajj, the lines outside her tent in Mina were long, pilgrims from everywhere waiting for a chance to ask their mother a question. One of them, Sa'id ibn Hisham, asked her what the character of the Prophet ﷺ had been like. "His character was the Qur'an," she said, and asked him whether he had read Surat al-Mu'minun. The senior companions came to her with the hardest questions of inheritance, which demand deep and exact knowledge, and she answered them. When Abu Hurayra and Abdullah ibn Umar disagreed on a matter, they would say, let us go and ask Aisha, she will settle it. Al-Zuhri said that if you gathered the knowledge of all the women of this world and weighed it against the knowledge of Aisha, hers would be greater. Others said they had heard the sermons of Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali, and never met anyone more eloquent than Aisha. When her nephew was asked where his own famed eloquence came from, he said all of it was from his aunt.

She also corrected what others had misunderstood. When a narration was reported that one who wakes in a state of impurity cannot fast that day, she explained it had been abrogated, for the Prophet ﷺ himself would wake so and continue his fast. When it

was reported that a woman passing in front of a praying person breaks the prayer, alongside a dog and a donkey, she objected, "You have compared us to dogs and donkeys," and explained that the Prophet ﷺ used to pray with her lying before him. A whole book was later filled with the cases in which she clarified the record. She rarely entered the disputes of politics; she preferred to remain a scholar teaching from her home. When the conflict known as the Battle of the Camel came, after the murder of Uthman, she had set out seeking swift justice, not a battle, and it was the people of corruption who attacked both sides in the night so that each thought the other had begun it. Ali, who was nearer to the truth in that affair, cut down the camel she rode without harming her, said, "May Allah forgive you, mother of the believers," and she answered, "May Allah forgive you." He sent her home honored and guarded, and afterward defended her name against anyone who spoke ill of her, and she would still send people to him for knowledge. Yet she grieved that episode all her life and used to say, "I wish I had died before that day."

"Nothing remains but that your soul leaves your body"

When she lay dying, fifty years after the Prophet ﷺ, Ibn Abbas asked to see her. She hesitated. "I am afraid he will praise me," she said. She wanted to leave this world busy seeking Allah's forgiveness, not hearing her own virtues recited. When he was allowed in and asked how she was, she said only, "Well, if I have taqwa." But Ibn Abbas gave her the most beautiful farewell. He told her, "Glad tidings to you. By Allah, there is nothing left between you and being reunited with the Prophet ﷺ and the beloved ones, except that your soul leaves your body." Fifty years of waiting, and the reunion was now one breath away. He reminded her that she was the most beloved of the Prophet's

wives, that her innocence had been sent down in the Qur'an itself, so that, as he put it, there is not a mosque in the world where Allah is remembered except that her innocence will be recited within it, night and day, until the end of time.

She wept, and made du'a, and asked Allah's forgiveness, and she passed away on the seventeenth night of Ramadan, the same day as Badr. Her funeral was so large that Medina seemed to tremble with the crowds who came to carry her to al-Baqi. They buried her praising Allah, and grieving how much of their memory of the Prophet ﷺ was being lowered into the ground with her. She is not beside him in the earth. But she is woven into every memory we have of him, and into the verses we recite, and she is his wife in Paradise as she was his wife in this life.

What Aisha's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel only that she was remarkable, and to leave it there. That would be to miss what her life is actually asking of us.

Begin with the grave. She wanted that place beside the Prophet ﷺ more than she wanted almost anything, and she gave it away, because she knew it would please him, and pleasing him was pleasing Allah. That is the question her life puts to us: when something you love, something you have every right to keep, stands between you and what pleases Allah, can you open your hand? Most of us hold tight to far smaller things. She let go of the dearest thing she had ever planned for herself, and did it quietly, and trusted Allah with the rest. Practice that in something small today. Give up a preference, a seat, a last word, a comfort you are entitled to, for the sake of Allah and no one's applause.

Then there is the cup of barley and the single grape. She did not give from her surplus; she gave from the food she had set aside for her own breaking of the fast. And when there was nothing left to give but one grape, she still gave it, because she believed that not one atom's weight of good is ever lost with Allah. That is a faith worth taking into an ordinary life. You do not need a hundred thousand dirhams to live as she lived. You need to believe, as she did, that what you give for Allah's sake is not gone, that He sees the small and the hidden, that He provides for the one who trusts Him more than they trust what is already in their hands. Give something this week that costs you, and ask nothing back, not even thanks, the way she refused even the gratitude of the people so that the whole reward would remain with Allah.

And carry away her contentment. She could have let comfort raise her station once the difficult years were over. She refused, for fifty years, because her heart was set on the next life and on a reunion she had been promised. She wept not for what she lacked but at the memory of the one she loved who had wanted so little. Her peace was never in her circumstances; it was in Allah and in His promise. When your own portion in this world feels thin, her life asks whether you can hold that same contentment, whether you can keep your eyes on what He has promised rather than on what He has withheld.

She trusted His promise before she could see it, gave for His sake without keeping the account, and stayed content with His decree until the morning her soul was finally free to go home. That is not a museum piece. It is a way of living that is still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Aisha, the mother of the believers, teach us a measure of her trust and her sincerity and her contentment, and gather us with her and with our beloved Prophet ﷺ in the gardens of Paradise.

This chapter follows the account of Aisha bint Abu Bakr (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (52:27, 99:7). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Aisha bint Abu Bakr

The One Whose Innocence Came Down from Heaven

There is a pattern in the life of our mother Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) that is easy to miss until you set her trials side by side. She was chosen for tests that no other wife of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was made to carry, and alongside every one of them she was given a blessing no one else in this ummah was ever given. Devastation, and then a gift so specific it could only have come from a Lord who was watching her closely. To read her life slowly is to learn how Allah deals with the people He loves: not by sparing them pain, but by turning their pain into honour.

This chapter follows her through the hardest years: the slander that nearly broke her, the quiet death of her mother, and the greatest sorrow ever to fall on the earth, which fell, of all places, into her lap.

The choice, and what she wanted

Before the slander, there was a different kind of test, and it tells you who she already was. Life in the household of the Prophet ﷺ was hard. Not because of him, for he had the most pleasant character of any human being and being near him was the greatest blessing of this world and the next. It was hard because of what came with him: the poverty, the deprivation, the cost of standing where the whole world could see you. The Prophet ﷺ

did not have proper furniture or proper food, no matter how much honour Allah had given him.

So Allah revealed a choice to his wives, and ordered him to lay it before each of them plainly.

Prophet, say to your wives, 'If your desire is for the present life and its finery, then come, I will make provision for you and release you with kindness, but if you desire God, His Messenger, and the Final Home, then remember that God has prepared great rewards for those of you who do good.'

QUR'AN 33:28-29

He came to Aisha first. He loved her, and surely hoped she would not take the other road, but he was just, so he gave her the choice and told her not to be hasty: go, consult your parents, take your time. She knew at once what she wanted. She asked, do you really want me to consult my parents about this? And she said the thing the whole of her faith stood on: I want Allah, and His Messenger, and the Hereafter. She needed no day and no father. The Prophet ﷺ breathed a sigh of relief and said, alhamdulillah.

Every wife of the Prophet ﷺ gave the same answer. None of them chose the world; they had weighed a lifetime of hunger against the company of this man and the reward behind him, and found the reward unmatched. Hold that scene in your mind, because the woman who chose Allah over comfort that day is the same woman who, a few years later, would be tested in a way comfort could never have prepared her for.

The lie that swallowed a city

It happened on the return from the campaign against Banu Mustaliq, six years after the Hijra. On that same journey Aisha had lost a necklace, a small thing that had already delayed the army. Now, in the dark before the army moved, she walked out to relieve herself. When she came back, the caravan was gone. They had lifted her curtained litter onto the camel assuming she was inside, for she was light, and marched on into the night without her.

She knew the procedure. A man was always left behind to sweep the route for anything forgotten. So she sat where they had last seen her and waited, and fell asleep. She woke to a voice saying, inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un: to Allah we belong and to Him we return. It was Safwan ibn al-Mu'attal (may Allah be pleased with him), the man assigned to follow the army and retrieve whatever was left behind. He recognised her, because he had seen her before the verses of hijab were revealed. He said those words and not one word more, brought his camel down, and walked away without looking at her. She mounted; he led the camel; he spoke nothing the entire way. And he entered Medina with her in broad daylight, hiding nothing, because there was nothing to hide.

That was when the lie began. The chief of the hypocrites, Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul, had his own reasons. On that very campaign he had been plotting against the Prophet ﷺ, and he needed anything that would change what the city was talking about. He saw Aisha, he saw Safwan, and he said to the people around him only this: I bet something happened between those two. Most who repeated it were not wicked; they were curious, and that is precisely the danger. They met it with their tongues without weighing what they carried. It became the gossip of the day, passed from mouth to mouth, and the hypocrites, scattered

among the believers, fed it a little here and a little there until it was the nightly talk of the whole city. Everyone knew that the most beloved person to the Prophet ﷺ was Aisha, and so everyone understood, without saying it, that to wound her was to wound him.

Who passed it on, and who refused

The responses to the slander run the whole range of the human heart, and they are worth studying one by one.

The best response came from Abu Ayyub al-Ansari (may Allah be pleased with him). His wife asked him, did you hear what they are saying about Aisha? He answered with a question: would you do such a thing? She said, of course not. He said, Aisha is better than you, and she is free of this. He would not entertain it for a single breath. It is the answer of a heart that loves the people of the Prophet ﷺ too much to let a rumour put one foot in the door.

Then there is Zaynab bint Jahsh (may Allah be pleased with her), one of the wives, the one woman who had every worldly reason to let the lie stand, for if Aisha fell, Zaynab might rise. The Prophet ﷺ came to her and asked what she knew. She could have given an ambiguous answer. Instead she said, O Messenger of Allah, I protect my hearing and my sight from this; by Allah, I know nothing of her but good. Aisha said of her, ever after, that Zaynab was held back by her taqwa, her fear of Allah. When the world handed her a chance to climb on a falsehood, her consciousness of Allah closed her mouth. That is what the fear of Allah is for.

And then, painfully, there were noble companions who slipped. Hamnah bint Jahsh, who imagined she was defending her sister Zaynab and so repeated the lie. Mistah, Aisha's own poor cousin,

a man who had fought at Badr. And Hassan ibn Thabit, the poet who had spent his tongue defending the Prophet ﷺ against his enemies, and whose tongue, this once, betrayed him. It is a hard lesson, that the people closest to the Prophet ﷺ were not beyond the reach of a careless word. But mark what Aisha did with it afterward. She would not let anyone curse Hassan in her presence; he was a man, she would say, who used to defend the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. His defence of the Prophet ﷺ weighed heavier with her than his offence against her, because she loved the Prophet ﷺ more than she loved herself.

A month of weeping, and the longest silence

Aisha knew none of this. She had fallen ill on the journey and lay sick for nearly a month while the whole city talked about her, and she had no idea. She sensed only one thing: the Prophet ﷺ was not as tender with her as he had always been. He would come in, ask briefly how she was, and leave. To anyone else that would have looked like ordinary kindness. But she knew him, and the small distance frightened her. That she could feel the absence of even a degree of warmth tells you how gentle he normally was.

She learned the truth from the mother of Mistah, who tripped one night and cursed her own son, and the whole thing spilled out. Aisha grew sicker. She went to her parents' home and asked her mother what the people were saying. Her mother tried to soften it: no woman is so beloved to her husband, among co-wives, without people talking about her. And Aisha wept. She said later, I cried that night until morning, my tears would not stop, I could not sleep a single moment, and the morning came and I was still crying, until I had no tears left.

Through all of this the Prophet ﷺ was waiting. And here is a part of the trial rarely told: the revelation had stopped. Not only about

Aisha. For a month no Qur'an came down at all. Jibril did not come. The Prophet ﷺ was looking to the sky and the sky was silent. He consulted those close to him, and they reassured him. Her servant Barirah, asked directly, said she had never seen anything blameworthy in Aisha except that she was young and sometimes fell asleep and let the dough go unguarded. Even her one fault was a kitchen fault.

The Prophet ﷺ stood on the pulpit and defended her and Safwan both: I know nothing but good of my family, and nothing but good of the man they name. But the gathering broke into the old tribal fighting between Aws and Khazraj, exactly the division the hypocrite had hoped to spark, and the Prophet ﷺ left it, disappointed. A slanderer can light in one hour a fire that burns for months, and sometimes years. Fitna is a climate: it takes over a community and gives Shaytan room to walk among people who have stopped thinking clearly.

A beautiful patience

At last the Prophet ﷺ came and sat with her, with Abu Bakr and her mother in the room. He spoke first as a Messenger must speak, not as a jealous husband. He said: Aisha, this is what has been said. If you are innocent, Allah will declare your innocence. And if you have done wrong, then repent to Allah, for when a servant confesses a sin and turns back, Allah turns to him.

Notice what he did not do. He did not ask whether she knew what this had done to him, or hint that none of it would have happened had she not wandered off. He was hurt as deeply as anyone, made none of it about himself, and laid no blame on her. He simply gave her the door, with mercy.

Her tears dried. She asked her father to answer for her, and he said he did not know what to say. She asked her mother, and her mother said the same. So she answered for herself. By Allah, she said, I find no example for myself and for you except the words of the father of Yusuf, peace be upon him. And she recited his patience:

'No! Your souls have prompted you to do wrong! But it is best to be patient: from God alone I seek help to bear what you are saying.'

QUR'AN 12:18

Then she turned away and lay down on her bed. She knew she was innocent and trusted that Allah would clear her. But hear what she expected, and what she did not. She never imagined Allah would reveal Qur'an about her. She said, I thought too little of myself to be worthy of Allah speaking about my affair in revelation that would be recited. The most she hoped for was that the Prophet ﷺ might see a dream that vindicated her. And from that low place, while she lay there, the revelation came down on him in the house of her father, and when it lifted from him he was smiling, and he said: Aisha, Allah has declared your innocence.

Her mother told her, get up and go to him. She said no. By Allah, I will not rise to him, and I will praise none but Allah, for it was Allah who declared me innocent. She thought too little of herself to expect a verse, and Allah sent down ten: ten verses of Surah an-Nur that cleared her name, rebuked the believers who had spread the lie, and warned the one who had begun it.

It was a group from among you that concocted the lie. Do not consider it a bad thing for you, it was a good thing, and every one of them will be charged with the sin he has

earned. He who took the greatest part in it will have a painful punishment.

QUR'AN 24:11

The scholars sat in wonder at the company this placed her in. Allah cleared Musa, peace be upon him, through a stone that ran off with his garment. He cleared Yusuf through the testimony of a child, and Maryam through the infant Isa speaking from the cradle. But Aisha He chose to clear Himself, directly, in words recited until the end of time. She had a few months of pain and was given an eternity of vindication. And her father, who had sworn never again to give charity to Mistah for wronging his daughter, heard Allah ask whether he did not wish to be forgiven, and resumed it that very day. That is the family she came from: when the choice was their own pain or the pleasure of Allah, they chose Allah.

The greatest sorrow, in her lap

That same year her mother, Umm Ruman (may Allah be pleased with her), fell ill and died, and the Prophet ﷺ went down into her grave, sought forgiveness for her, and said that whoever wished to look upon a woman of Paradise should look at her. Then came the sweet years, the victories, the farewell pilgrimage. And on his return from that pilgrimage, Aisha began to see in the Prophet ﷺ what others were not yet seeing: he was slipping.

She watched him pray at night sitting down, he who had once stood until his feet swelled. Asked whether he prayed sitting, she said, yes, after the people had worn him out. She had seen her husband give his whole body to this ummah, give in two decades what could not be given in lifetimes, and be consumed by his own giving. As the illness deepened, he kept asking his wives,

where am I tomorrow, and they understood he was longing for her day, so they gave their days to her, and he was carried to her house to spend whatever remained of his life. Even then, barely able to move, he still found it in him to joke with her, dying and still reaching for her with tenderness.

When at last he could not lead the prayer, he told them to have Abu Bakr lead it, and made one final effort, dragged out with his feet trailing the ground, to sit beside Abu Bakr and pray with the people. His fever was so high that to touch him was to be burned; she said she had never seen anyone suffer in death as he suffered, and that after seeing it she envied no one their own. When he grew too weak to recite over himself and wipe his body as was his habit, she would take his blessed hands, recite into them, and wipe him with them, seeking the blessing in his hands over her own.

Of an ummah by then more than a hundred thousand strong, only one person spent his final moments with him: Aisha. He was propped against her chest. Her brother came in with a fresh siwak, and she saw the Prophet's ﷺ eyes go to it, for he loved to clean his mouth before meeting his Lord. She softened the stick with her own saliva and gave it to him, and he used it. She counted it among the greatest blessings of her life that he died in her house, on her day, the last thing in his mouth her saliva mixed with his. Then Jibril entered with the angel of death. The Prophet ﷺ raised his finger and said, O Allah, the highest companion. O Allah, the highest companion. And his soul left, and his hand fell.

She shrieked, and the masjid knew. The greatest tragedy ever to strike this earth, and it happened in her lap. Allah could have taken him in prostration, or leading the prayer. He chose her lap.

The woman chosen for the deepest pain was chosen, too, to hold the most beloved of creation as he met his Lord.

What Aisha's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel only grief and awe, and leave it there. But her life is not only a story of sorrow nobly borne. It is a question put to your own iman.

She thought too little of herself to expect even a single verse, and Allah honoured her beyond every other woman of this ummah. The world rewards those who push themselves forward and insist on recognition. Aisha lay down on her bed convinced she was too small for Allah to mention, and from that lowness she was raised the highest. Humility before Allah is never wasted on Him. When you are wronged and no one defends you, when your reputation is in other people's mouths and out of your hands, her life tells you where to put your case: not in the court of public opinion, but in the hands of the One who exonerated her. He sees what they did. He records what you bore. And what He chooses to do with it is better than anything you could have arranged for yourself.

She also gives you a thing to do today, and it is a thing of the tongue. The slander did not begin with the wicked; it spread through the curious, ordinary people who repeated what they had not weighed. Most of the harm in our own age travels the same way, through forwarding, sharing, wondering aloud about someone who is not in the room. Take Zaynab's restraint as your measure: she had a worldly reason to repeat it and her fear of Allah shut her mouth. Today you will almost certainly be handed something about someone, true or not. Hold your tongue for the sake of Allah, not because it is polite, but because He is watching

what you carry on it. That single restraint, repeated across a life, is a quiet act of worship.

And learn from her the patience that has Allah's name inside it. When everything she had was being stripped away, she did not say it will be fine; she said, a beautiful patience, and from Allah alone I seek help. That is sabr that leans on Allah, not on the hope that the situation will turn. Her contentment was never in her circumstances; it was in her Lord, all the way to the moment she held a dying Prophet ﷺ and could only say, I will praise none but Allah. When your own hardship comes, and it will, do not merely endure it; endure it toward Allah, asking His help, trusting that the same Lord who turned her worst month into eternal honour can do the like with yours.

So take one thing from her into your ordinary life. Carry your need to Allah before you carry it to people. Refuse one piece of gossip this week for His sake alone. Meet one hardship with a beautiful patience that turns to Him for help and not to bitterness. That is how the most beloved of women lived, in humility, in guarded speech, in a patience that rested on Allah. May Allah be pleased with Aisha, who was cleared by revelation from above the heavens and held His Messenger ﷺ until his last breath, and may He raise us upon a measure of her trust in Him, and gather us in the company she kept.

This chapter follows the account of Aisha (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (33:28-29, 12:18,

24:11). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Aisha bint Abu Bakr

The Beloved

There is a question that was once put to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in front of a crowd of his Companions, and the answer to it tells you almost everything about the woman this chapter is about. A man named Amr ibn al-As (may Allah be pleased with him), who had embraced Islam late and after a long history of opposing the Prophet ﷺ, had been treated with such warmth that he half-suspected he might be the most beloved person in the world to the Messenger of Allah. So he asked him outright, certain the answer would be his own name: "O Messenger of Allah, who is the most beloved person to you?"

The Prophet ﷺ did not hesitate. He said, "Aisha."

Amr, flustered, clarified that he meant among the men. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Then her father." Not "Abu Bakr." Her father. Even in naming his dearest friend, his love ran through Aisha first.

This is the story of that love. Not a love invented by poets, but a love witnessed by an entire community over many years, recorded in detail, and preserved so that we could learn from it. Aisha bint Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with her) lived inside the house of the Messenger of Allah, and through her eyes we see him as no biography could ever show him: at home, smiling, holding a hand, racing across the sand, weeping in the night.

A love the whole community knew

The love between them was no secret. It was so well known that the people of Madinah, the Ansar, who watched everything that pleased the Prophet ﷺ so they could please him too, began to save their gifts for the nights he spent in Aisha's home. When they wished to send him food, they waited for her night. When they had a gift to give, they waited for her night. They did it out of love for him, and it filled her home with a quiet abundance the other households did not see.

It also caused a problem, because the other wives of the Prophet ﷺ were hurt by it. Aisha herself describes how the wives had formed into two groups: one around her, with Hafsa and others whose fathers were close to the Prophet ﷺ, and one around Umm Salama and the rest. They sent a delegation to ask the Prophet ﷺ to tell the Ansar to bring their gifts on every night, not only Aisha's. First they sent Umm Salama, a woman whose wisdom and voice he deeply respected. She raised the matter once, and he was silent. She raised it again, and he was silent. The third time, he answered her gently, asking her not to hurt him concerning Aisha, and telling her something remarkable: that revelation had never descended upon him while he lay under the blanket of any wife except Aisha. Even heaven, it seemed, had honoured her with something the others did not have.

Then they sent Fatima (may Allah be pleased with her), his own daughter, the person whose place in his heart everyone knew. She came and raised the complaint out of obligation. He answered her with a question only a father could ask a daughter so like himself: "O my daughter, do you not love whom I love?" She said of course she loved whatever he loved. He said, "Then love this woman." And Fatima went back and would not return to the matter.

Finally they sent Zaynab (may Allah be pleased with her), the one wife who could match Aisha in argument. Zaynab spoke against Aisha, and went further than she should have, while Aisha sat boiling, waiting for permission to defend herself. The Prophet ﷺ, who was scrupulously fair, finally allowed her to answer, and Aisha spoke until she had silenced her. Then he said, with something close to pride, "She is the daughter of Abu Bakr." He was not praising anger. He was praising the eloquence and the keen intelligence she had inherited from her father, the sharpness that could build an argument you could not help but admire.

The fear of a fair heart

Here is the thing about all of this that should stop us. The Prophet ﷺ loved Aisha more than any of them, and everyone knew it, and yet he was terrified of being unjust. He divided his time equally. He gave each wife her full right. His character, as Aisha herself said, was the Qur'an, and he wronged no one in his household.

But he knew his own heart leaned, and a heart cannot be commanded. So he used to make a supplication that lays his soul completely open before Allah. He would say, in meaning, "O Allah, this is my division in what I control, so do not blame me for what You control and I do not." He was speaking about his own heart. He could be perfectly fair in the things he could measure, the nights and the provision and the time, but the inclination of his heart toward Aisha was not in his hands, and he placed that openly before his Lord rather than pretend it away.

There is a lesson buried in that prayer for every person who has ever tried to be fair while their feelings pulled them one way. You are answerable for your actions. You are not condemned for the involuntary tilt of your heart, only for what you do with it. The

Prophet ﷺ modelled the most honest possible relationship with Allah about a thing he could not fully control.

Inside the house

What flows from Aisha's memory after this is a portrait of a home, and it is one of the greatest gifts Allah gave this ummah. Over two thousand narrations come through her, and a great many of them simply show us what the Messenger of Allah was like behind his own door.

He would come home smiling and cheerful. If the matter was not serious, he found a way to turn it light. He sewed his own clothes, patched his own sandals, and served the people of his household. He slept on a bed of leather stuffed with palm fibre, and once when Aisha folded it double to soften it for him, he disliked it, because the softness made him sleep too deeply and he wanted to stay ready for the night prayer.

He was tender in small, deliberate ways. He would hold her hand while he spoke to her. He would turn his whole body to face her, the same full attention he gave to anyone he spoke with, brought home to his own wife. He drank from a cup and was careful to place his lips where she had placed hers. When they shared meat from a bone, he would eat from the very spot she had eaten from. Aisha would smile, even laugh, as she remembered these things years later, long after he was gone.

There was a reason she spoke about it so openly. When the Muslims came to Madinah, they met a community with very strict rules about what a husband and wife could do, and some Muslims assumed those strictures applied to them too. So Aisha narrated, plainly and without embarrassment, how the Prophet ﷺ would kiss his wives and then go out to pray without renewing his

ablution, how he would be affectionate while fasting yet never cross the limits Allah had set, because, she said, "who among you has control of himself the way the Messenger of Allah ﷺ had control of himself?" She was teaching, through her own marriage, that the faith of Islam was its own thing, gentle and human, not the severity people had imagined.

Even in the last ten nights of Ramadan, when he secluded himself in the mosque in worship, he would lean his head through the doorway into her room so she could comb and oil his hair, because he knew she missed him, and he wanted her to know that even in the depth of his devotion, he was still thinking of her.

How he answered her heart

Again and again, the Prophet ﷺ affirmed her, and he did it by paying close attention. In one of the longest narrations she preserved, Aisha recounted for him a conversation among eleven women, each describing her husband in turn, and she remembered every word of every woman, an astonishing feat of memory. As she reached the last woman, who praised a husband named Abu Zar who had loved her like a queen and then left her, the Prophet ﷺ did not cut her off to go to the mosque or to command an expedition. He listened to the whole long thing, and at the end he said to her, "I am to you as Abu Zar was to his wife, except that I will never divorce you."

When she asked him how his love for her stood, he said it was "like the firm knot." From time to time, after they had quarrelled, she would ask again, "How is the knot?" and he would smile and say, "Just as it was."

There is the day of Eid, when two girls were singing the old songs in her room, and her father came in scandalised, calling

them "the instruments of Satan in the house of the Messenger of Allah." The Prophet ﷺ, resting, turned and said, "Leave them, Abu Bakr, it is Eid." And then, knowing the Ansar were spear-dancing in the mosque, he asked Aisha, "Would you like to watch?" She said yes. He stood her behind him, her cheek resting against his cheek, and let her watch, asking gently, "Are you satisfied? Are you satisfied?" She admitted, honestly, that she had grown bored of the spectacle early on, but she stayed because she wanted to measure her place with him, to see how long he would stand there for her sake. He stood until she said she was content.

When a Persian neighbour invited him to a meal and pointedly excluded Aisha, the Prophet ﷺ simply went home. The man invited him a second time, and again would not include her, and again the Prophet ﷺ declined and left. Only on the third invitation, when the man finally said, "and her too," did he go. He would not enjoy what she was shut out of.

And his attention to her ran so deep that he could read her moods. He once told her, "I know when you are pleased with me and when you are angry with me." She asked how. He said, "When you are pleased, you swear, 'No, by the Lord of Muhammad.' But when you are upset, you say, 'No, by the Lord of Ibrahim.'" She had stopped using his name when she was cross. She laughed and admitted that the only thing she withheld in anger was his name; she never spoke an ugly word against him.

Her jealousy, and the line she could not cross

Aisha's love was fierce, and her jealousy was famous, and the Prophet ﷺ understood exactly where it came from. Once a group of his Companions were in her home when one of the other

wives sent over a dish of food, a quiet suggestion, perhaps, that he should feed his guests something better. Aisha came out from behind the curtain, in front of everyone, picked up the dish, and broke it. The Companions sat in stunned silence, watching to see what he would do. He said only, "Your mother became jealous, your mother became jealous," and he calmly told them to bring another dish to replace the broken one. He named her, before all of them, not "my wife" but "your mother," the Mother of the Believers, and he covered her in that hard moment because he knew her jealousy grew out of how much she loved him.

But there was one line her jealousy could not cross, and it concerned a woman Aisha had never even met. Aisha said she was never as jealous of anyone as she was of Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her), who had died before Aisha entered his home, because the Prophet ﷺ remembered her constantly, would slaughter a sheep and send portions to her old friends, and would brighten at the sound of her sister's voice. One day Aisha said to him, sharply, had not Allah given him someone better than that old woman. She watched his face redden and saw the hair of his head stand on end, and he said, "No. By Allah, Allah never gave me anyone better than her," and he began to recount all that Khadijah had been to him. Aisha never forgot the lesson of that loyalty, that a love given for the sake of Allah outlasts even death.

The night he wept

Of all that Aisha witnessed, the things she loved most about him were not his smile or his tenderness. They were his worship. She watched his feet swell from standing so long in prayer, and when she asked why he exhausted himself when Allah had already forgiven him, he answered, "Should I not be a grateful servant?"

When the Companions once asked her to tell them the most amazing thing she had ever seen from him, she fell silent, and then she wept for a long time, until everyone around her wept too. Imagine the memories moving through her. Then she said his whole life was a wonder, but she would tell them of one night.

That night he had asked her, with courtesy, "Will you let me get up and worship my Lord tonight?" And this woman, the one who woke in the dark to feel for him beside her, who could not bear his absence even in sleep, gave the most beautiful answer she could have given. She said, "By Allah, I love to be close to you, but I love even more what makes you happy." So he rose. And she watched him pray, and his eyes began to flow, and he kept weeping until his beard was soaked, and the ground before him was wet with his tears. A concerned wife, she asked why he wept so, when Allah had forgiven him. He said again, "Should I not be a grateful servant?" Then he told her that a verse had been revealed to him that night, and "woe to the one who reads it and does not reflect upon it." It was the verse about the signs of Allah scattered across all creation:

In the creation of the heavens and earth; in the alternation of night and day; in the ships that sail the seas with goods for people; in the water which God sends down from the sky to give life to the earth when it has been barren, scattering all kinds of creatures over it; in the changing of the winds and clouds that run their appointed courses between the sky and earth: there are signs in all these for those who use their minds.

QUR'AN 2:164

This is the home Aisha gives us. Not only a home of laughter and held hands and races across the sand, but a home filled with the descent of revelation, a home where the most beloved of all

people to the Messenger of Allah lay awake and watched him weep over the signs of his Lord.

What Aisha's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read the love between Aisha and the Prophet ﷺ and feel only its sweetness, to enjoy it as a story and close the book. That would be to miss what it is for. Aisha did not preserve these scenes so we would sigh. She preserved them so we would learn how to love, and how that love should sit beneath a greater love for Allah.

Look first at the answer she gave on the night he asked to pray. "I love to be close to you, but I love even more what makes you happy." She wanted his nearness more than almost anything, and she set it aside the moment a higher good appeared. This is the order a believing heart is meant to keep. We love our spouses, our children, our comfort, our rest, and all of it is permitted and good, but none of it is allowed to stand in the way of what pleases Allah. Ask yourself honestly what you would say if the person you love most asked to leave your side to stand before Allah in the night. Aisha's answer is the one faith aspires to: I love you, and I love your nearness to Allah more.

Look next at what she loved most in him. Not his gentleness, though he was the gentlest of men, but his worship. She married into the most tender household on earth, and the thing that moved her to tears in memory was the sight of him weeping in prayer over a single verse. This tells you what to treasure in the people you love. It is a fine thing when someone makes you laugh and holds your hand with care. It is a far greater thing when their connection to Allah is so real that watching it strengthens your own. Marry that. Befriend that. Become that. Be the person

whose nearness to Allah makes the people around them want to pray.

And look at the verse itself, the one he wept over, and refuse to let it pass the way he warned us not to. The ships on the sea, the rain that wakes a dead land, the winds and clouds running their appointed courses, all of it is sitting in plain sight, every single day, waiting to be seen by people who use their minds. The Prophet ﷺ was forgiven, and still he wept and stood all night because he refused to read such words and feel nothing. Most of us read the signs of Allah, in a verse or in the sky, and turn over and go back to sleep. Tonight, read one verse slowly and let it land. Step outside and look up and let the size of it move you toward the One who made it. That is tadabbur, reflection, and it is a door to iman that stands open to anyone willing to stop and look.

So take something small and real from this house into your own. Put your love for Allah above the thing you love most, even once, even in something little, and feel how it loosens the grip the world has on you. Treasure the people whose faith makes you better, and try to be that person for someone else. And before you sleep, read one verse as if it were sent to you, and do not let yourself read it without reflecting. May Allah be pleased with Aisha, the most beloved, who let her husband rise from her side to weep before his Lord, and may He place in our hearts a love for Him that orders every other love beneath it.

This chapter follows the account of Aisha (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2:164). Where the

histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Aisha bint Abu Bakr

The Beloved of the Beloved

When the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ first heard the call of revelation, he came down the mountain shaking and was caught in the arms of Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her). When he left this world at the end of his mission, he was resting against the chest of another woman, his head near her heart. Allah sent these two women to the two ends of the same life, each exactly when she was needed: the first carried him through the loneliest years, the second brought light back into a home that grief had darkened. Her name was Aisha bint Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with her), and to understand why a quarter of this religion reaches us through a single human being, you have to begin not with the wife, but with the child watching her father weep over the Qur'an.

A house of believers

She was the daughter of Abdullah ibn Uthman, the man the whole ummah knows by his nickname, Abu Bakr as-Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him), the most truthful of men and the greatest of this community after the prophets. Her mother was Umm Ruman, a woman of the tribe of Kinanah whom the Prophet ﷺ described as a woman of Paradise. Aisha was their only daughter, with one full brother, Abdur-Rahman, and she grew up alongside her half-sister Asma. The scholar al-Imam al-Dhahabi titled her simply: the daughter of the great Siddiq.

There is something profound in that title. Abu Bakr wanted nothing in this world more than to be at the side of the Prophet ﷺ, who said no one had benefited him with their wealth and loyalty more than Abu Bakr. Then, by the decree of Allah, even his offspring became a benefit greater than anyone could imagine, as the love Abu Bakr carried for the Messenger ﷺ passed into his daughter, until she became the single greatest source of comfort in the Prophet's home.

Her names tell you who she was. The most beautiful is Habibatu Habibillah, the beloved of the beloved of Allah. The Prophet ﷺ also called her by tender, shortened names, Aish and Ruwaish, little Aisha, and he called her Humaira, the one with the reddish glow, because her fair complexion would flush red: she turned red when she was shy, and red when she was angry. One name she asked for herself, seeing that every woman she knew carried a kunya while she had none. He told her to take hers from her nephew Abdullah ibn Zubair, the son of her sister Asma, and from that day she was Umm Abdillah. In giving her that, the Prophet ﷺ taught a quiet lesson: the maternal aunt holds the station of the mother.

The child who remembered everything

The other wives of the Prophet ﷺ had all lived a life before Islam and most had been married before. Aisha was different. "I do not remember a time in my life," she said, "except that my parents were Muslims." She was born after the revelation had come, and never knew her parents to worship anything but Allah.

She remembered, with a child's clear and unforgettable eye, what those years cost. "I cannot recall a single day of my childhood," she said, "except that the Prophet ﷺ visited our house, morning and evening." So the most consequential years of the early

mission unfolded before a watching girl. She saw her parents sit with the Prophet ﷺ and learn the verses of Makkah by heart, struggling to memorise Surat an-Najm. She lived through the boycott and the torture, and she stored it all.

She remembered her father coming home bruised. There is a bitter irony in it: the man who tortured Abu Bakr was Nawfal ibn Khuwaylid, the brother of Khadijah, so the Prophet's own brother-in-law would tie up his closest friend and beat him. She watched her father return from the streets marked by cruelty, having shielded the Messenger of Allah ﷺ with his own body, beaten near the Kaaba one day until he lost consciousness.

She remembered the goodness too. She watched her father gather the money from their home and walk out to buy the freedom of the persecuted, freeing Bilal and freeing Khabbab (may Allah be pleased with them), men the world counted as worthless and her father counted as worth everything, because he sought only the reward of Allah. And she remembered his tears: he was a man who could not control his eyes when he recited the Qur'an. Watch the child watching her father break down over the words of revelation, and you begin to understand the woman she became. The love of the Qur'an, of charity, of the Prophet ﷺ, she inherited all three straight from Abu Bakr, along with his fondness for camels, his love of poetry, and his sharp, eloquent tongue.

The dream in green silk

After Khadijah died, the Prophet ﷺ was a single father in deep sorrow. By the customs of Makkah it was strange for a man in his fifties to remain unmarried, stranger still that he had spent twenty-five years married to one woman alone. But the Prophet

ﷺ had no appetite for this world, and no hurry to fill the place Khadijah had left.

Then came the dreams. For three nights in a row, the Prophet ﷺ said, the angel Jibril came to him carrying something wrapped in silk, in one narration green silk. "This is your wife in this world and in the next," the angel said, and within the cloth was an image. The Prophet ﷺ later told Aisha herself: it was you. He did not act on the dream, and he told no one. He simply said that if this was from Allah, it would surely come to pass.

At the very same time, far away in Abyssinia, an older woman named Sawda bint Zama'a was having dreams of her own. In one, the moon descended into her home and rested at her side, and her husband told her that if it was true, he would soon die and the Prophet ﷺ would marry her. She thought it impossible: she was past fifty, a mother of many, and by every worldly measure no longer a woman who would marry again. Then her husband passed away, and she returned to Makkah certain that chapter of her life was closed.

Neither the Prophet ﷺ nor Sawda had said a word of these dreams to anyone. Into this stepped Khawlah bint Hakim (may Allah be pleased with her), a relative of Khadijah and the matchmaker of the community. She came to him gently. "It is as though a great loneliness has entered you," she said, "with the loss of Khadijah." He answered, "She was the mother of my family, the heart of this home." Then she asked directly: "O Messenger of Allah, will you not marry?" He said, "Whom?" She had two women in mind. Of the first she said the most beautiful thing: "Aisha, the daughter of the most beloved of Allah's creation to you." The man who had dreamed of Aisha and spoken to no one now heard her name from another's mouth. The

second, she said, should be Sawda, who believed in him, who followed him, and whose life had grown very hard.

The honest man who would not break his word

Khawlah went first to Umm Ruman. "Allah has decreed something good for you," she said. "The Prophet has mentioned Aisha." The mother was overjoyed, but said they must wait for Abu Bakr.

When Abu Bakr came home, his first concern was not his daughter's youth. It was something purer. "Can he even marry her," he asked, "when he is my brother?" His worry was whether it was permitted, because he and the Prophet ﷺ were brothers in faith. The Prophet ﷺ answered that brotherhood in Islam did not make forbidden what blood-brotherhood would forbid. Abu Bakr was overjoyed again. But he had one more difficulty, and it reveals the man completely. He had already given his word that Aisha would marry the son of Mut'im ibn Adi, and Abu Bakr did not break promises, not in the days of ignorance and not in Islam.

So he went to Mut'im to settle it honestly. Mut'im was an honourable ally of the Muslims, but he had never embraced the faith and made no secret of his disdain for it. As Abu Bakr asked whether they still intended the marriage, Mut'im's wife began to insult his new religion: she did not want her son entangled with Abu Bakr's daughter, lest the girl drag him into this faith and ruin him. Inwardly Abu Bakr rejoiced; outwardly he kept his composure. "You hear what she says," Mut'im said. And so the engagement dissolved, freely and without a broken promise. Abu Bakr hurried home. "Call Khawlah," he said. "Tell the Prophet ﷺ we are ready."

There is a current of irony beneath this, the kind that runs all through the seerah: the son Aisha had nearly married, Jubair ibn

Mut'im, would one day be the master of Wahshi, the man who killed Hamza (may Allah be pleased with him), before Wahshi himself came to Islam. Islam was quietly sorting the fates of people.

The marriage was agreed in Makkah, with the understanding that, by the custom of the Arabs, Aisha would move into the Prophet's home only once she had reached the age at which she became a woman, the most ordinary form of marriage they knew. So Aisha grew up knowing now whom she would one day marry, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ himself.

The Hijrah through her eyes

Some of the most vivid scenes of the migration reach us through Aisha, because she watched it unfold from inside the house of Abu Bakr. When the persecution grew unbearable, her father set out to migrate to Abyssinia, and the family was already on the road when a tribal chief named Ibn al-Daghina met him and asked where he was going. "My people have driven me out," Abu Bakr said. "I want to roam the earth and worship my Lord." The chief was astonished. A man like you, he said, is never driven out: you help the needy, you keep the ties of kinship, you carry the burdens of others, you honour the guest. They are almost exactly the words Khadijah had once spoken about the Prophet ﷺ. The chief placed Abu Bakr under his protection and brought him home.

But Abu Bakr was a man of da'wah, and praying behind closed doors was not enough for him. He built a small mosque in the courtyard before his house and recited the Qur'an there in the open. Aisha watched the women and children of Makkah gather at the walls to listen, because her father could not hold back his tears as he recited. When Quraysh complained, Abu Bakr handed

the protection back. "I am content with the protection of Allah," he said.

Then the Prophet ﷺ came to their house at an hour he never normally came, his head covered. Even before he spoke, Abu Bakr understood. "By Allah," he said, "he has come only for something serious." For months Abu Bakr had kept two camels ready out back, fed and waiting, hoping the Prophet ﷺ might one day ask him to come along on the migration. The Prophet ﷺ asked that the room be cleared. "It is only your family," Abu Bakr said. Then he was told that Allah had granted him permission to migrate. "Will I have your companionship, O Messenger of Allah?" Abu Bakr asked. The Prophet ﷺ said yes. And Aisha witnessed something she had never seen in all the years of pain. "I had heard that people weep from joy," she said, "but that was the first time I ever saw a man cry out of happiness." Her father wept because he would be at the side of his closest friend on a journey that might well end in death. When he offered one of his camels as a gift, the Prophet ﷺ refused to take it except by paying its price.

So the household began to pack. Aisha's sister Asma tore her own waist-belt in two to tie up the food, earning her name, the one with the two belts. Aisha herself was too young for the secret work of the migration. Later, the Prophet ﷺ sent Zaid ibn Haritha to bring the rest of the family north, and a small caravan set out under his care, the women and children of the Prophet's house and Abu Bakr's together.

On that road something happened to Aisha that she never forgot. Her camel bolted and carried her away from the group, and as she was about to be lost, her mother cried out, "His bride! The Prophet's bride!" Not "my daughter," but the wife of the

Messenger of Allah ﷺ, this was far more serious than losing a child. And then Aisha heard a voice tell her, "Hold the reins." The camel stopped, turned, and walked back to the caravan. An unseen voice, in all likelihood an angel, had returned her to the family of the Prophet ﷺ.

A wedding of milk

In Madinah, in a district called Bani Harith ibn al-Khazraj, Aisha fell ill and lost some of her hair. Then she recovered, her hair grew back beautifully, and she reached the age at which the marriage would be completed. She remembered the moment exactly. She was on a swing with her friends when her mother called her, took her by the hand, and led her to the door. "I was still panting," she said, "until I calmed down a little." Umm Ruman washed her face and her head and brought her inside, where the women of the Ansar were already singing songs of blessing, getting her ready.

This was the first wedding in Madinah, and the Ansar, who loved the Prophet ﷺ more than themselves, watched closely, for how the Messenger of Allah ﷺ conducted his own marriage would set the expectation for everyone. He entered, the most handsome of grooms, and Aisha, shyness flooding her face, sat among the women. And what did the wedding feast hold? Not slaughtered animals, not a lavish table, but a single bowl of milk, sent over by Sa'd ibn Ubadah (may Allah be pleased with him), who ran the kitchen that fed the poor of the city. The Prophet ﷺ drank from it and handed it to Aisha. She froze. "Do not turn away the hand of the Prophet," the women told her. "Drink." So she drank, out of shyness, and set the bowl in her lap. "Give some to your friends," he said. The girls claimed they were not

hungry, and he answered gently, "Do not lie about being hungry," and they drank.

Years later she would say it plainly: which of the wives of the Prophet ﷺ was as blessed as I? Her dowry was the same modest fifty dirhams he gave each of his wives, her wedding a bowl of milk passed among children, and she was the only wife he ever married who had belonged to no one before him.

The poverty of that household was real, and she never complained of it. "We would look at the crescent moon, then another, then another," she said, three moons, two months, "and no fire was lit in the house of the Prophet ﷺ." No fire meant nothing to cook. When her nephew asked how they survived, she said, "The two black things, dates and water," along with whatever milk their good neighbours among the Ansar sometimes sent. Her possessions were a red shirt for home, a black cloak for going out, and one yellowish dress for the festivals of the Ansari women: the first lady of Madinah owned three garments. The household had one mattress, folded up to sleep on at night and spread out to sit on by day. And when the Prophet ﷺ rose to pray in their tiny apartment, he would gently tap her leg to make room, and she would draw it back so he could prostrate.

She tried to make up for the poverty in small ways. She was not, by her own admission, much of a cook, so she would comb the Prophet's hair and serve him as best she could. And she noticed, with wonder, that he repaired his own clothes and mended his own sandals. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ served the people of his own home. She was still so young that she had brought her old dolls into the marriage, among them a toy horse with wings; when he asked, amused, about a horse with wings, she told him

the prophet Sulayman had horses with wings, and the Prophet ﷺ laughed.

Above everything, she inherited her father's love of giving. When she had a few coins for charity, she would perfume them with musk first, because, she said, they were going to Allah. And once, when at last there was lamb in the house and a beggar knocked, Aisha gave it all away except the shoulder she had saved, knowing the Prophet ﷺ loved it. When she told him, he answered, "Rather, all of it remains except the shoulder," for the only thing that truly stays is what is given for the sake of Allah.

What Aisha's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read the life of Aisha and stop at the love story, to admire the brilliance of the woman through whom a quarter of the religion reaches us, and leave it there as something beautiful but distant. That would be to miss what her life is asking of us. Her story is not first about romance or scholarship. It is about a heart trained, from childhood, to love what Allah loves and give for His sake without counting the cost.

Look again at the child. Before she was a wife, before she was a teacher of the ummah, Aisha was a little girl watching her father weep over the Qur'an, watching him come home bruised for the sake of the Prophet ﷺ, watching him empty his wealth to free slaves who could give him nothing in return. She did not merely witness this; it formed her. Her love of the Qur'an, of charity, of the Messenger ﷺ, did not fall from the sky. It was absorbed, year after year, from a home where Allah came first. That is the first thing her life asks of you: what is your home teaching the small eyes that are watching you? The things you weep over, the things you give away quietly, the One you turn to when life is hard, all of it is being recorded by your children and by your own

heart, and it will outlast you. We shape the next generation less by what we say than by what they catch us doing for Allah.

Then look at the poverty she never once complained about. Two months would pass without a cooked meal, and she remembered it not with bitterness but with awe at the man she shared it with. Her peace was never in the bowl of milk or the single mattress; it was in Allah and in the one He had chosen for her. We live surrounded by far more than she owned, and far more discontent. Her contentment is a question put to us directly: is your trust in Allah strong enough to stay steady when the comforts you lean on are taken away? She held steady because she knew the worth of a life is measured not by what fills the house but by Who fills the heart.

And learn from how she gave. She perfumed her coins before giving them in charity, because she knew where they were going. She treated a few small coins as a gift presented to Allah Himself, and made them as beautiful as she could before letting them go. That is sincerity, ikhlas: the quiet certainty that the One receiving the deed is Allah, and that He is worth our best and not our leftovers. When the Prophet ﷺ told her that the only part of the lamb she truly kept was the part she gave away, he was teaching her, and us, the strangest arithmetic in existence: what you grip is lost, and only what you release for Allah is saved. The meat she gave away is hers forever.

So take one concrete thing from her into today. Give something for the sake of Allah that no one will ever know about, and make it your best and not your spare. Hold steady through one hardship without complaining to Allah, the way she held steady through years of it. And plant, in whatever home is yours, one habit the watching eyes around you will absorb as love for Allah,

a recitation they hear, a charity they see, a patience they cannot forget. This is not the life of a woman too lofty to imitate. It is the life of a girl who learned to love Allah by watching, and grew into a woman who gave Him her best in silence. May Allah be pleased with Aisha, the beloved of His beloved, and fill our hearts and our homes with a measure of what filled hers.

This chapter follows the account of Aisha (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). No Qur'anic verse is quoted directly, as the lecture cites none in full; references to revelation and to Surat an-Najm are given in prose. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Kulthum ibn al-Hadm and Sa'ad ibn Khaythamah

The Hosts of Quba

When the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ finally completed the long, hunted road out of Makkah, the first place his camel carried him was not the great city that would one day bear his name. It was a settlement on the edge of it, a cluster of date gardens and low houses belonging to a single tribe, where the dust of the road was washed off in the quiet of two weeks that the histories almost pass over. The place was Quba. And the men who opened their homes to him there, two of them in particular, were ordinary in every way the world counts greatness, and extraordinary in the only way that lasts.

Their names were Kulthum ibn al-Hadm and Sa'ad ibn Khaythamah (may Allah be pleased with them). To understand why they matter, you have to understand what the Prophet ﷺ was walking into, and what it cost them to receive him.

The land that remembered every feud

Yathrib, before it became Madinah, was a city written in tribal lines. The land itself recorded the hostilities. Each clan held its own quarter, and the quarters were not neighbourhoods so much as fortified positions, because the tribes had been at war with one another for generations. There was no single ground they all shared. There was only territory, won and held and grieved over.

Into this the Prophet ﷺ arrived as a complete stranger from Makkah, and somehow, in a way that should leave anyone studying it quietly amazed, he wove these warring people into one body. He did it through an intentionality so deliberate that it touched everything: how he spoke to a man, how he honoured a tribe, how he divided even his hours among them. He moved between the great tribes and their many sub-tribes like a man carrying water across uneven ground, never spilling, never favouring one at the expense of another, giving each its rightful place.

The first of those places was Quba, on the outskirts. It belonged to a sub-tribe whose people, the histories agree, were among the purest who ever came to Islam. There were no hypocrites in Quba in those early days, no double hearts. It was, as one description has it, like a camp pitched for two weeks that held the best of those who had fled Makkah and the best of those who had come out to receive them, with the Prophet ﷺ living in the middle of it. And the men who hosted that camp, who turned their gardens and their homes over to it, are the subject of this chapter.

Kulthum, the old man who believed at once

Kulthum ibn al-Hadm was the chief of his tribe in Quba, and he was an elderly man. That detail matters more than it first appears. In Makkah it was the tribal chiefs, the men with status and standing to lose, who gave the Prophet ﷺ the hardest time of all. Pride hardens with age and with rank, and Kulthum had both. Yet when news reached him that a Prophet was coming, this old chief did not calculate, did not weigh his position, did not stall. He believed immediately. And in the same breath, he made a decision that tells you the whole shape of the man: let us set

aside everything we have for the Messenger of Allah. Whatever he wants, it is his. Let him come, and we will receive him, and we will honour him.

He was the one who extended the invitation. Come to the tribe of Banu Amr, he sent word, and we will take care of you, O Messenger of Allah. And so when the Prophet ﷺ reached Quba on a Monday, the twelfth of the month, the same day of the week, the histories note, on which he had been born, it was the home of Kulthum that opened to him first. For the first week he stayed there.

The Prophet ﷺ made Kulthum, in effect, his brother. When the believers of Madinah were later paired with the emigrants of Makkah, brother to brother, this old man was already something like that to the Prophet ﷺ: the one whose roof sheltered him, whose house held him through the nights. And it was during those nights that Kulthum's home became a council chamber. The elders and the chiefs of the tribes would come, and the senior companions who had made the journey would be there, and in that gathering the future of a community was quietly being built. By day the Prophet ﷺ would go elsewhere, but the evenings belonged to the elders, in the house of the old man who had believed at once.

There is a courtyard preserved in Quba even now, a shaded garden beside a resting place, where the Prophet ﷺ would receive the delegations of elders. The house of Kulthum stood right beside it. A man can stand there today and be standing where an old chief gave away his comfort without a moment's hesitation, simply because the truth had come and he recognised it.

Rifa'ah, the man Allah praised for purity

There was a second host in Quba whose name the world has almost forgotten, and yet whose praise is recited in the Qur'an in nearly every corner of the earth. He was the brother in faith of Kulthum, a man the histories preserve under the name Rifa'ah, and the Prophet ﷺ lodged in his house as well. When the Prophet ﷺ later spoke of "my brother from the Ansar," it was this man he meant.

His reputation was a strange and beautiful one. He was, the companions said, the man whom Allah was describing when He spoke of those who love to purify themselves. There is a mosque in Quba that Allah honoured directly in His Book, and He honoured its people in the same verse. When the verse came down, the Prophet ﷺ walked out to the people of Quba and told them plainly that Allah had beautified His praise of them in the story of their mosque. What is it, he asked them, that you do? They answered that their neighbours had taught them to wash for prayer, and they had taken to it with such care, washing themselves before they prayed, cleansing themselves with diligence, that it had become their habit even before Islam arrived. Listen to what was revealed about them:

[Prophet], never pray in that mosque. You should rather pray in a mosque founded from its first day on consciousness of God: in this mosque there are men who desire to grow in purity- God loves those who seek to purify themselves.

QUR'AN 9:108

The scholars of the language noticed something gentle in the wording. The verb chosen for their purifying carries a sense that reaches past the body. They washed the dirt from their skin, yes,

but Allah was praising people who also washed the filth from inside themselves: the hatred, the envy, the slander, the resentment. They cared about the inner stain more than the outer one. There are people who polish the outside and leave the inside rotting; these were the opposite. And Rifa'ah, who loved to purify himself, was among the foremost of them. The Prophet ﷺ said of him, in a sound report, what a great man, a man of Paradise.

When he died, a companion stood over his grave and said there was no man left on the face of the earth who could claim to be better than the one who lay in it. And then he added a detail that captures the quiet, unboastful service of these people: I never saw a banner raised for the Prophet ﷺ except that this man was standing beneath it. He did not push himself forward. He did not crowd into the affairs of the community for the sake of being seen. He simply gave himself, purely, again and again, and Allah lifted him into a verse that will be read until the end of time.

Sa'ad, the young man who hosted the youth

If Kulthum's house held the elders by night, another house held the young by day, and it belonged to Sa'ad ibn Khaythamah. He was a young man, but he was no latecomer. He had been there at the very beginning, one of those who travelled from Yathrib to Makkah and pledged themselves to the Prophet ﷺ in the first pledge, before the migration, before there was any safety in it. He was, in fact, the only one of his tribe present at that first pledge, and so he stood as its representative, young as he was.

His home in Quba was called the House of the Bachelors. All the young, single men gathered there, and so the Prophet ﷺ divided his days with a tenderness worth pausing over. The evenings he gave to the elders in Kulthum's home. The days he gave to the

youth in Sa'ad's. Day with the young, evening with the old, day with the young, evening with the old, for two weeks, so that no age and no station of the community would feel passed over. From the first hours, the Prophet ﷺ made himself an accessible leader to every part of the people he had come to.

It was in these days too that the building of the mosque of Quba began, and the young men who clung to Sa'ad's circle got to see something they had not expected. The leader they had waited months for, the one they had climbed trees and scanned the horizon to glimpse, did not arrive exhausted and demand to be served. He arrived and went straight to work. He laid stones with his own hands. He stood in the heat. He helped prepare the food. The Ansar, who had imagined a king, found a man building a mosque beside them. And Sa'ad's house became the place where the plans were made, the matters discussed, the road forward charted.

A father, a son, and a coin between them

Sa'ad's father, Khaythamah, was a believer too, and the most touching part of this whole story lives in a single conversation between the two of them.

When the call came to march out to the Battle of Badr, father and son both wanted to go, and they could not both leave; one had to stay and care for the family. So the father came to his son and made his case as a father will. Let me be the one to go out and fight beside the Prophet ﷺ, he said. You stay back with the family. Prefer me in this.

The son's answer is one a parent never forgets. He told his father that if the stakes of this were anything other than Paradise, he would gladly have preferred him and stayed home. But this is

Paradise we are talking about, he said. To go out at Badr and be with the Messenger ﷺ, this is Jannah. I cannot simply hand it to you. Forgive me, father. We have to settle it another way.

So they cast lots. Two believers, father and son, drew lots for the chance to risk their lives in battle, because each of them wanted that nearness to the Prophet ﷺ so badly that he would not yield it even to the one he loved most. The lot fell to Sa'ad. The young man marched out to Badr, and his father stayed behind.

Sa'ad was killed at Badr. He was among the very first to fall, and among the small handful of Muslims martyred in a battle the Muslims won. He was struck down by one of the champions of Quraysh. So the two hosts of Quba, Kulthum and Sa'ad, both left this world early: Kulthum dying soon after the migration he had welcomed, and Sa'ad falling on the field of Badr, his pledge fulfilled in blood.

When the army returned, the news of victory had run ahead of it. Khaythamah, the father, came out searching the ranks for his boy. Where is Sa'ad, he kept asking, where is Sa'ad. And they told him. The grief of it was sharpened by memory, because he could not stop hearing that conversation again, the coin, the lots, his son's gentle refusal to give up Paradise even to his own father.

Two verses, a father and his son

Then something happened that turned the father's sorrow into resolve. Khaythamah longed for what his son had been given. If I am granted another chance to be with the Prophet ﷺ, he said, in the very spirit Sa'ad had shown, I will show how I love my Messenger. And the chance came. At the Battle of Uhud, when the lines broke and chaos swallowed the field and so many fled,

Khaythamah was among those who stayed and stood firm beside the Prophet ﷺ.

The scholars looked at this father and son and noticed something that should make the heart still. Each of them is embraced in a verse of the Qur'an. The son, Sa'ad, was among the people of Quba whom Allah praised as those who love to purify themselves. And the father, Khaythamah, was among those Allah described when He spoke of the believers who kept faith with their covenant, who longed to prove their love at Badr, missed it, and swore they would not abandon their Prophet ﷺ if the chance ever returned:

There are men among the believers who honoured their pledge to God: some of them have fulfilled it by death, and some are still waiting. They have not changed in the least.

QUR'AN 33:23

Some fulfilled the pledge by dying, as the son had at Badr. Some were still waiting, their resolve unbroken, as the father was until Uhud. They had not changed in the least. And there is no other father and son in the whole record, no other parent and child, where one is a martyr of Badr and the other is named among the faithful who never wavered. You can let yourself imagine the meeting the scholars described: the son, already among the souls of the believers, receiving his father into that company, the two of them reunited and rejoicing in what they had each given.

What the lives of Kulthum and Sa'ad ask of our faith

It would be easy to read this chapter and feel only warmth, to admire two generous hosts and a touching family story and move on. That would be to miss what their lives are actually asking of

us. They are not a pleasant tale. They are a set of questions put to our own iman.

Begin with Kulthum, the old chief who believed at once. He had every worldly reason to hesitate. His standing, his age, his comfort, his authority over a tribe, all of it argued for caution, and the proud chiefs of Makkah had made exactly that calculation and lost their souls to it. Kulthum did not calculate. The truth came and he recognised it and he opened his hands and his home before anyone could promise him a return. That is what trusting Allah's promise looks like before the outcome is visible: to say yes to the truth while it is still inconvenient, still costly, still unproven in the eyes of the world. Most of us guard our hearts until we are certain it is safe to give them. The old man gave first. Ask yourself what you are still withholding from Allah while you wait for it to become easy, and whether the truth you already recognise deserves better than your hesitation.

Then there is the purity that Allah praised in the people of Quba. They were honoured in the Qur'an not for some great public feat but for washing themselves with care, outwardly for prayer and inwardly of the filth that rots a heart: the envy, the grudges, the quiet slander we let ourselves keep. This is within the reach of anyone reading this. You cannot host the Prophet ﷺ in your home, but you can do today what they did: guard your wudu, and just as seriously, drain the resentment out of your chest before you stand before Allah. He loves those who seek to purify themselves, and He named the ones who did. That love is still being offered. The inner cleaning is the harder and the more beloved of the two, and no one but Allah ever needs to see it.

And there is the coin between a father and his son. Sa'ad would not hand his father an easy escape from hardship, not because

he loved his father little, but because he loved Paradise more, and he understood that nearness to Allah is not a thing you politely give away. His whole family treated closeness to the Prophet ﷺ as the one possession worth competing for, worth dying for, worth refusing your own father over. Set that beside how lightly we let our own chances at good slip past: the prayer we delay, the charity we mean to give later, the night we keep meaning to stand in. They cast lots for the danger. We make excuses to avoid the ease. Their lives ask whether we truly believe that what is with Allah is better, or whether we only say it.

Here is the part that should lift the heart. Nothing these men gave was lost. Kulthum welcomed the Prophet ﷺ and died soon after, and the world might have called it a small, brief life, hardly long enough to count. Sa'ad fell at Badr as a young man with so much un-lived. Yet Kulthum lies among the very first buried in the blessed earth of al-Baqi, and Sa'ad is embraced in a verse of the Qur'an, reunited with a father who is embraced in another. What the world would weigh as short lives cut off too soon, Allah recorded as lives perfectly spent. This is the promise that should change how you measure your own days: what you give to Allah, He keeps; what looks like a life poured out for nothing may be, in His sight, the most complete success a person can be granted.

So take one thing from them into an ordinary day. Say yes to a truth before it is safe, the way the old man did. Clean one grudge out of your heart for the sake of Allah, the way the people of Quba cleansed themselves. Refuse to give away one chance at good that you have been letting slip, the way a son refused to surrender his place at Badr. May Allah be pleased with Kulthum ibn al-Hadm and Sa'ad ibn Khaythamah, and with every host of Quba whose name the world forgot and Allah did not, and may

He gather us in the company of those who loved Him enough to compete for His nearness.

This chapter follows the account of the hosts of Masjid Quba in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (9:108, 33:23). Where the auto-transcribed names were unclear, they have been rendered to standard seerah spelling; where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Jabir ibn Abdullah

The Orphan Who Carried the House

There is a kind of grief that does not get to be grief for very long, because the moment it arrives, a list of responsibilities arrives with it. A father is killed, and in the same breath a young man learns that he now owes a fortune he does not have and must raise a houseful of sisters he cannot feed. That was the inheritance handed to a seventeen-year-old boy from Medina on the worst day of his life. What he did with it, and what Allah did for him through it, became one of the most tender stories the companions ever told.

His name was Jabir ibn Abdullah ibn Amr ibn Haram al-Ansari (may Allah be pleased with him), and though most people do not know his life well, they know his words. He narrated more than fifteen hundred ahadith from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, standing among the very greatest of those who carried the Prophet's words to us. He lived through the firsts and the lasts, from a pledge before the migration to the day he became the last great companion to die in the city of the Prophet ﷺ. To understand what made him, you have to begin with the family that produced him, and with a father who loved him more than anyone on earth except one.

A family that moved its whole life toward the Prophet ﷺ

Jabir came from the tribe of Banu Salima, the people of Mu'adh ibn Jabal and of Amr ibn al-Jamuh, whom the Prophet ﷺ said he saw walking in Paradise without the limp he had carried in this world. This was a tribe that did not merely accept Islam; it rearranged its entire existence around the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. When the Prophet ﷺ settled in Medina, they resolved to sell their land and move beside his mosque, simply to be near him, until he told them, "O Banu Salima, stay in your homes; your footsteps will be written, and for every step you take toward the mosque you will be raised a degree." What the story preserves forever is the longing in these people: they could not bear to be far from him.

Into this tribe Jabir was born, the only son among many daughters, seven by some accounts, nine by others. His father, Abdullah ibn Amr ibn Haram, was a senior man of the tribe, the brother-in-law and closest friend of its chief, Amr ibn al-Jamuh, and among the first twelve men of Medina to take the hand of the Prophet ﷺ at the first pledge of Aqabah, before the migration, before anyone could know how the story would end. He came home, and Islam swept through the whole household: his wife, his siblings, his daughters, and his young son.

Jabir's mother was Unaysah bint 'Anamah (may Allah be pleased with her), who gave herself to this religion with love and stood behind her son in his pursuit of it. Her brother, Jabir's maternal uncle, was Tha'labah ibn 'Anamah, one of the men who broke the idols of Medina when Islam came. It was Tha'labah who once asked the Prophet ﷺ about the crescent moons, and the answer came down in the Qur'an:

They ask you [Prophet] about crescent moons. Say, 'They show the times appointed for people, and for the

pilgrimage.' Goodness does not consist of entering houses by the back [door]; the truly good person is the one who is mindful of God. So enter your houses by their [main] doors and be mindful of God so that you may prosper.

QUR'AN 2:189

This was the house that raised Jabir: a father who pledged early, a mother who loved the faith, an uncle whose question the Qur'an answered. They were not wealthy. They worked the land, sold what dates they could, and gave themselves to the service of the Prophet ﷺ in every way they were able.

The night his father knew

His father wanted him bound to the Prophet ﷺ from the start. So when the second pledge of Aqabah came, when seventy-two men of the Ansar went out to give their allegiance, Abdullah brought his boy along. Jabir would say of that night, "I was the youngest person there."

When Badr came, Jabir was fifteen, old enough to plead to go and young enough to be told no. His father said he was needed at home with his mother and sisters, and went out to Badr alone and came back among the victorious. Then came Uhud, and with it one of the rawest scenes preserved in the entire life of the companions, told to us in Jabir's own voice.

He said his father called him to himself the night before the battle, a vast army marching from Makkah to kill them, the believers steadying their hearts. And in that dark, Abdullah said, "O my son, I have a feeling that I will be among the first to be killed of the companions of the Prophet ﷺ." We do not know what gave him that certainty; the righteous sometimes sense the nearness of their leaving. Then he said the thing a son does not

forget. "I am not leaving behind anyone on this earth dearer to me than you, except the Messenger of Allah ﷺ." Even to his own beloved son, the Prophet ﷺ came first. And then the inheritance: "I have many debts. When I am gone, take care of them. And be good to your sisters." The boy was seventeen, and he hoped his father was only bracing for the worst.

He was not. The very first man to fall as a martyr at Uhud was Abdullah ibn Amr ibn Haram, killed by Sufyan ibn Abd Shams before the battle had even fully turned. His best friend Amr ibn al-Jamuh, the chief, was martyred that same day. The two seniors of Banu Salima fell together, and the one provider for Jabir's household was gone.

Let him see his father

They brought Abdullah's body to the Prophet ﷺ, mutilated, as the enemy had done to many of the dead. The Prophet ﷺ turned away from the sight, pained, and they covered Abdullah's face with a sheet.

Then his son came. Jabir threw himself forward, trying to pull the cloth back to see his father's face, and the people tried to stop him. But the Prophet ﷺ did not forbid it. "Let him see him," he said. So Jabir uncovered his father, and he wept, and the Prophet ﷺ did not stop his weeping. Somewhere nearby a woman shrieked; it was Fatima, Abdullah's sister, and the Prophet ﷺ told her that the angels had kept their wings over Abdullah's soul from the moment he was raised, all the way to the heavens. He was being honored above, even as they grieved below.

The Prophet ﷺ buried Abdullah and Amr ibn al-Jamuh together in a single grave, the two friends who had loved Allah together, served him together, and fallen together. When Amr's wife Hind,

who was Abdullah's sister, began loading the bodies onto a camel to carry them home, the Prophet ﷺ told her the martyrs should be buried where they fell. So there they stayed, side by side.

Why do I see you broken?

The trauma did not end with the burial. Now the boy faced the debts and the sisters, and the weight of it bent him. The Prophet ﷺ came to him after a time and asked, "O Jabir, why do I see you broken?" There it is, in one question, the empathy of a leader who notices when a young man has lost his joy. Jabir told him: his father killed, the debts heavy, all his sisters his to care for.

Then the Prophet ﷺ gave him something no money could buy. "O Jabir, shall I tell you something about your father?" Allah had never spoken to anyone except from behind a veil, he said, except that He spoke to Abdullah directly, face to face. Allah said to him, "O My servant, ask of Me whatever you wish." And Abdullah, gazing on his Lord and overwhelmed by His generosity, did not ask for ease or reward. He asked to be sent back to the world to be killed in the way of Allah a second time. Allah told him it was decreed that the departed do not return. So Abdullah asked one thing more: that the news be carried to those he had left behind, so they would know he was well. And it was in answer to this, the longing of a martyr to comfort his grieving family, that Allah revealed:

[Prophet], do not think of those who have been killed in God's way as dead. They are alive with their Lord, well provided for, happy with what God has given them of His favour; rejoicing that for those they have left behind who have yet to join them there is no fear, nor will they grieve;

QUR'AN 3:169-170

Sit with what this meant for a seventeen-year-old who had just pulled the cloth from his father's mutilated face: the father he had buried was not lost, but alive with his Lord, rejoicing, trying from the next world to tell his son not to grieve.

There is one more thing Jabir could not let go of. About six months later, unable to rest until his father had a grave of his own beside Amr, he opened the burial and found the body as fresh as the day it was laid down, fragrant, untouched but for a little at the ear. The story of that body is not finished.

The household shaped even his marriage. Jabir married a woman much older than himself, past the age of childbirth. When the Prophet ﷺ asked why he had not married someone young, that the two might delight in each other, Jabir answered that with all his sisters to raise he had needed a wife who could be almost a mother to them, to comb their hair and teach them. The Prophet ﷺ told him he had done well. There was no romance in the choice, only a young man putting his sisters' needs above his own comfort, and Allah, who is not outdone, blessed it despite her age with two children.

The orphan and the miracles

What follows reads almost like Allah pouring blessing over the most disadvantaged member of that society until it overflowed. The debts came calling, and Jabir, ashamed and stretched thin, did not even ask the Prophet ﷺ to pay. He asked only, "Will you come and sit with me, so the creditors might see you and go easy on me?" And the Prophet ﷺ, who was tending an entire ummah, came and sat and helped him negotiate. But one creditor, not a Muslim, was within his right to refuse, and wanted his money now. So the Prophet ﷺ told Jabir to harvest his dates and sort them into piles, then invoked blessing over them and told him to

begin paying. Jabir filled bag after bag, paid the man in full, paid everyone, and when he looked back the piles stood untouched, as though he had taken nothing.

There was the night they came to call the night of the camel. Jabir was at the very back of the army returning from Hamra al-Asad, only ten months after his father's death, on an exhausted, slow camel because he was still poor. The Prophet ﷺ circled back, found the boy at the rear, struck the camel with a stick and made a supplication, and the animal surged to the front until they were telling him to slow down. Then the Prophet ﷺ asked to buy it. Jabir, delighted, kept trying to give it as a gift, and each time the Prophet ﷺ said, "May Allah forgive you, sell it to me," seeking forgiveness for the boy twenty-five times while insisting on paying. They settled on a price. Then in the city the Prophet ﷺ had Bilal pay him and add to it, took the camel, and as Jabir turned away, called him back: "The price and the camel are both yours, O Jabir. Did you really think I would take your camel?"

The miracles followed him because he followed the Prophet ﷺ. Of the twenty-one campaigns in the Prophet's life, Jabir said he was present at nineteen and never left his side, missing only the first two because his father had kept him home. At the trench, where the companions struck a boulder they could not move, he saw the Prophet ﷺ with a stone bound against his stomach to hold down the hunger, for they had not eaten in three days and the Prophet ﷺ always ate last. Unable to bear the sight, Jabir went home, where he and his wife had only a young goat and a little barley. He slaughtered it, set it to cook, and went to quietly invite the Prophet ﷺ and one or two others. But the Prophet ﷺ stood and called out, "People of the trench, Jabir has made food for you. Come!" Over a thousand men ate from that one small pot

and that little bread, served by the Prophet's own hands, and when it was done the pots were still full.

He saw the small tenderness behind the miracles too. The Prophet ﷺ once took him by the hand to his own house, where there was only broken bread and a little vinegar to dip it in, and he said, "What a fine dip vinegar is," and from that day Jabir loved vinegar for the rest of his life, because the Prophet ﷺ had praised it. It was Jabir who narrated that the Prophet ﷺ was never asked for anything and said no, and that every act of kindness is a charity. He had lived inside that kindness.

The last of them

When the Prophet ﷺ performed his Farewell Hajj, it was Jabir who preserved it whole. The longest and most complete narration of that pilgrimage, from the day the Prophet ﷺ left Medina through his sermons and sacrifice and rites at Mina, is Jabir's, told from beginning to end without a break. The youngest at the pledge had become, in old age, the careful keeper of the Prophet's final journey.

Jabir lived long, as many of the great narrators did, and the long life was a mercy and a sorrow both. A mercy, because the ummah kept drinking from his knowledge: he taught in the mosque of the Prophet ﷺ and passed the religion to the best of the next generation, men like Sa'id ibn al-Musayyab and Hasan al-Basri. But a sorrow too, because he lived to see the fitna, the strife and bloodshed that broke the community apart. By then he had grown old and lost his sight, and when people came to tell him of the troubles, he said, "I wish my hearing would go the way my sight has gone," so that he would not have to hear it.

Even blind and near the end, his hunger for the words of the Prophet ﷺ did not fade. Hearing that a companion in Syria held a single hadith he had never heard with his own ears, Jabir bought a camel and made the long journey for that one hadith. "A hadith reached me that I had not heard," he told the astonished man at his door, "and I feared I would die, or you would, before I could hear it from you."

And then, the seal on his father's story. Forty-six years after Uhud, a flood swept through Medina and washed against the edge of the martyrs' graves and uncovered the two bodies, as fresh as the day they had died. The people, most too young to have ever seen the martyrs, rushed to tell Jabir. He came, an old blind man now, to the father he had buried as a boy, and the body was so untouched that an old wound began to bleed afresh when the hand resting on it came loose, and they set the hand back as it was. This was the man Allah had spoken to without a veil, who had asked to die again and been told instead to carry his joy to the living. They reburied him, and his friend beside him.

Jabir ibn Abdullah died at last at the age of ninety-four, the last of the major companions to die in Medina. The son of Uthman ibn Affan led his funeral prayer, and it was among the largest the people had ever seen. A piece of the first generation had gone.

What Jabir's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life so full of miracles and feel that it belongs to another world, where camels are transformed and pots never empty, and that it has nothing to ask of us. That would be to miss the whole point. The miracles are not the lesson. The boy who received them is the lesson.

Look first at how Jabir's grief was answered. He stood broken over a debt he could not pay and sisters he could not raise, and what Allah gave him through the Prophet ﷺ was not a sermon on patience but the news that his father was alive, rejoicing, unafraid. That verse is in your hands too. The people you have buried and loved for the sake of Allah are not lost to you. When sorrow comes for someone who died upon faith, your iman is asked to believe what Jabir was told: that they are with their Lord, and that there is no fear upon them, nor will they grieve. Hold to that the way he had to.

Look next at the order of the father's love. On the last night of his life, telling his son how dear he was, Abdullah could not say it without an exception: dearer to me than anyone, except the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. That is what real iman does to the heart. It does not erase your love for your family; it puts that love in its true order, beneath the love of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ. Ask yourself honestly where that love sits in you, whether anything has quietly climbed above it, and whether you could say, as he did, that even what is dearest to you does not come first.

Then look at the marriage that tells you who he was, the older wife chosen not for himself but so his sisters would have someone to mother them. There is a whole way of living folded into that choice: putting the needs of the weak above your own comfort, quietly, without applause. You can imitate it this week. Do the unseen work of caring for someone who cannot repay you, an aging parent, a struggling sibling, a child who needs more than is convenient, and do it for Allah, not for the credit. His greatness began not on a battlefield but in a house full of sisters who needed him.

And look, finally, at where the blessing landed. Allah did not pour His miracles over the richest or most powerful man of Medina. He poured them over the orphan with the debts. This is the promise that should change how you carry your own hardship: Allah sees the one bent under a weight no one else notices, and what looks from the outside like a crushed and burdened young life can be, in His sight, the very life He has chosen to fill. When you are stretched thin and unseen, doing right for His sake with no one to lighten the load, you are exactly where Jabir was when the blessing came.

So take one thing from him into your ordinary days. Trust that what you give and whom you bury for the sake of Allah are not lost. Put your love of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ back above whatever has crept ahead of it. And shoulder, this week, one unseen burden for someone who cannot thank you, the way a seventeen-year-old once shouldered a house full of sisters and a mountain of debt and let Allah carry the rest. May Allah be pleased with Jabir and with his father whom He spoke to without a veil, raise us upon a measure of their faith, and gather us with them in the highest gardens in the company of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Amin.

This chapter follows the account of Jabir ibn Abdullah (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2:189, 3:169-170). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

The Martyrs of Mu'tah

The Banner That Would Not Fall

There is a stretch of ground in the land of Jordan where, fourteen centuries ago, three thousand men stood and looked at an army that may have numbered two hundred thousand. They had been sent to answer a murder. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was not among them. He had stayed in Madinah, and yet he would lose, in a single afternoon, three of the people closest to his heart in all the world. He would stand on his pulpit and describe their deaths as if he were watching them, one banner falling and another hand reaching to lift it, his voice quivering, then his face overcome with grief.

This is not the story of one companion. It is the story of a few men who carried one banner, and of what they understood about life and death that allowed them to walk toward an army forty times their size without turning back. To begin to feel the weight of it, you have to start with how they came to be there at all.

Why three thousand were sent north

After the treaty of Hudaibiyyah, and then the opening of Khaybar, the Muslims had, for the first time, both strength and a measure of peace. The Prophet ﷺ used that breathing space to send messengers out across the known world, calling kings and emperors to Islam. He sent to the emperor of Rome. He sent to Kisra, the emperor of Persia. He sent envoys in every direction,

and the reactions varied. Kisra tore the letter and threatened the Prophet ﷺ, and the Prophet ﷺ prayed that Allah would tear his kingdom apart, which in time came to pass.

In the direction of Syria, the Prophet ﷺ sent a companion named al-Harith ibn Umayr al-Azdi, carrying a letter toward Busra. He was stopped on the way by the Ghassanid Arabs, Christian Arabs allied to Rome and a standing threat from the north. Their chief asked him where he was going. He answered honestly. He was asked whether he was a messenger of the one who claimed to be a messenger, of Muhammad ﷺ. He said yes. And then this man did a thing that violated every law and custom the Arabs and the wider world held sacred: he killed the envoy.

You did not kill the messenger of a messenger. Even Kisra, who tore the letter and threatened the Prophet ﷺ, did not touch the man who delivered it. To kill an ambassador was understood, everywhere, as an act of war and a kind of barbarism. Al-Harith was the only envoy of the Prophet ﷺ ever murdered. When the news reached Madinah, the Prophet ﷺ gathered an army of three thousand and sent them toward Mu'tah. And before they left, he did something he had not done before. He named, in advance, who would lead them, and who would lead them if that leader fell, and who would lead them after that. Zayd ibn Harithah would carry the banner. If Zayd was killed, then Ja'far ibn Abi Talib. If Ja'far was killed, then Abdullah ibn Rawahah. Three names, three men he loved, spoken aloud as a line of succession into death.

When the three thousand arrived and saw what waited for them, the histories say it was the most disproportionate force the Muslims had ever faced. Some of the men wanted to send a message back to Madinah and wait for new instructions. It was

Abdullah ibn Rawahah who refused. What you are afraid of, he told them, is exactly what we came here for. If we are granted martyrdom, we are granted martyrdom. Do not fear it. And they went forward.

Zayd, the one the Prophet held as a son

The first to carry the banner was Zayd ibn Harithah (may Allah be pleased with him), and to understand why his death struck the Prophet ﷺ so deeply, you have to know that Zayd had chosen him long before there was anything to gain by it.

He had been abducted as a child from the slave market and passed from hand to hand until he came, before the revelation of Islam, into the household of the Prophet ﷺ. His father, Harithah, never stopped searching for him. He composed lines of grief, weeping over his lost son, not knowing whether the boy was alive to be hoped for or had died somewhere far away, on a mountainside, by some accident he would never learn of. Then, years later, the father found him. Zayd was given the choice every captive longs for: come home to your father and your tribe, be free, be among your own people. Or stay.

Zayd chose to stay. He said he had seen something in this man Muhammad ﷺ that he would not leave for anything, and this was before a single verse had been revealed. The Prophet ﷺ took him out to the people and declared that Zayd was his son, that they would inherit from one another. Later, when the Qur'an corrected the custom of attributing an adopted son's lineage to other than his true father, Zayd returned to being called the son of Harithah, but nothing changed in the closeness between them. He remained one of the most beloved people in the Prophet's life.

It was Zayd who was with the Prophet ﷺ in the worst moments, when no one else was. In Ta'if, when the Prophet ﷺ was driven out and stoned and left bleeding, it was Zayd at his side, no other human being. The Prophet ﷺ had a way of testing his commanders, and the histories note that when he sent out an army for a major battle, he chose its leader with care. For Mu'tah he chose Zayd to carry the banner first.

In Madinah, the Prophet ﷺ was given the unfolding scene of the battle, and his voice quivered as he relayed it. Zayd has been killed, he said. The young man he had held as a child and embraced as an adult, the one who had stood with him when no one else would, fell first, grasping the banner. Allah tells us not to call such men dead:

[Prophet], do not think of those who have been killed in God's way as dead. They are alive with their Lord, well provided for,

QUR'AN 3:169

Ja'far, who would not let the banner touch the ground

When Zayd fell, the banner was taken up by Ja'far ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him), the first cousin of the Prophet ﷺ and ten years younger than him, and extremely beloved to him.

Ja'far had been one of the great early figures of Islam. When the Muslims of Makkah could no longer bear the persecution, it was Ja'far who led those who emigrated to Abyssinia, who stood before the Negus, the Christian king, and gave one of the most eloquent introductions to Islam ever spoken. He was barely past twenty. The king embraced the faith at his hands and gave the Muslims a safe place to worship. Ja'far stayed in Abyssinia for

years, guiding that community on the Prophet's behalf, while the rest of the Muslims made the hijrah from Makkah to Madinah and lived through everything that followed.

He came back only after Khaybar, arriving in Madinah on a boat. The Prophet ﷺ was so overjoyed that he embraced him and said he did not know which made him happier, the opening of Khaybar or the coming of Ja'far. He paid Ja'far the highest compliment, saying that he resembled the Prophet ﷺ himself, in his appearance and in his character. Ja'far had the same love of the poor. One of his names was the father of the poor, for how he would sit with them and care for them. He was eloquent and beautiful, and his very name carried the sense of perfected speech.

And it was almost the moment Ja'far had finally settled back home, after years away, that the army was dispatched to Mu'tah, and his was the second name. He plunged into the enemy. The narration in Bukhari is hard to read slowly without your chest tightening. As he held the banner in his right hand, the Romans cut off his right hand. He caught the banner with his left. They cut off his left hand. A man with no arms could have fallen and no one would have faulted him, but Ja'far went down to the banner and held it up between the stumps of what was left, refusing to let the flag of the Muslims touch the ground. He was struck more than fifty times, by some accounts up to ninety, until he died, still grasping the banner against his body.

When the news came, the Prophet ﷺ went himself to Ja'far's home. His wife, Asma, did not yet know what had happened, only that something was wrong. The Prophet ﷺ came into the house, his face covered in grief, and Ja'far's two boys ran to him to be embraced, and he held them and began to smell them, and then

he began to weep. This was the news he had come to carry: their father was a martyr. Later those children would be greeted in the streets as the sons of the one with two wings, because the Prophet ﷺ gave the glad tiding that Allah had given Ja'far two wings in place of his two arms, with which he flies in Paradise. The bodies, the Prophet ﷺ taught them, are nothing. Ja'far was already flying with the angels while his cousin stood weeping on the earth below.

Abdullah, who argued with his own soul

The third banner was carried by Abdullah ibn Rawahah (may Allah be pleased with him), and his is perhaps the most piercing of the three, because he carried into battle a fear he refused to obey.

Abdullah was among the first poets of the Prophet ﷺ, one of those who met the message early in Madinah and embraced it without hesitation. He was a warrior who fought in every battle alongside the Prophet ﷺ, and a worshipper, the kind of man who would be fasting on a scorching day when no one else was. He was also the poet who stood beside the Prophet ﷺ and answered the insults of the enemies of Islam with verse, and the Prophet ﷺ said his words rained down on them harder than arrows. He was a man given the glad tiding of Paradise, trusted and praised on many occasions.

And yet this same man was seen weeping before the battle. When they asked him why, he did not speak of the enemy. He spoke of a verse. He had heard the words of Allah that every single soul will approach the Fire, that all of us must pass over it, and that this is a decree that will be fulfilled:

but every single one of you will approach it, a decree from your Lord which must be fulfilled.

QUR'AN 19:71

He wept not for his body but for that crossing. Here was a man promised Paradise, who had stood with the Prophet ﷺ in the most precious of moments, and still he trembled at what every soul must face before its Lord. This is the seriousness of a real believer: hope and fear held together, never letting the promise become carelessness.

At Mu'tah, when the banner came to him, the histories record that even Abdullah felt a flicker of hesitation as death drew close. And so he turned and addressed not the enemy but himself. He spoke to his own soul as a man speaks to a frightened companion. O my soul, he said, why do I see you turning away from Paradise? Why do I see you hating to enter it? Forward. I will enter you into Paradise whether you like it or not. And he drove deep into the army until he was struck down and killed.

On his pulpit in Madinah, the Prophet ﷺ had relayed the deaths one after another. With Zayd his voice quivered. With Ja'far his face showed grief. Then time passed, and he saw that Abdullah had fallen, and the Prophet ﷺ began to cry. Three men he loved, named in order before they ever left, taken in the order he had named them.

The sword that Allah unsheathed

The army now had no commander. The three the Prophet ﷺ had appointed were gone, and the men stood on the field of Mu'tah with the banner needing a hand. A companion named Thabit ibn Aqram picked it up and called for them to choose someone. They turned to a man named Khalid ibn al-Walid.

Khalid (may Allah be pleased with him) was, at this point, a new Muslim. He had accepted Islam only months before Mu'tah, and this was his first battle fighting for the Muslims rather than against them. The men knew him, and what they knew was uncomfortable: this was the man whose battlefield cunning had turned the tide against them at Uhud, years earlier, when he was still their enemy. There was hesitation, on his side and on theirs. But they appointed him, and on this day he became what the Prophet ﷺ would later call him: the unsheathed sword of Allah.

What Khalid did was not a charge but a deliverance. He understood that three thousand could not win this battle by force against an army that size, but they did not need to. He devised a way to make the small army look enormous. He moved his forces, shifted the formations, ordered the men to kick up clouds of dust and to tie things to their camels and horses so that columns seemed to arrive from new directions. To the watching enemy it looked as though fresh reinforcements were pouring in from everywhere. Under cover of that confusion, Khalid struck at the center with the men he had, inflicted heavy losses, and extracted the entire Muslim army largely intact. Khalid himself later said that nine swords broke in his hand on the day of Mu'tah.

Three thousand had faced something close to two hundred thousand and come home. While the Prophet ﷺ grieved in Madinah for the three he had lost, the army returned alive, and it was understood as a kind of miracle and a victory, and the Muslims came back with their confidence renewed.

The others who lie in that ground

The three commanders were not the only ones who fell. Among the martyrs of Mu'tah was a young man only about forty years old who had been present at every single battle with the Prophet

ﷺ, and now lay in that same earth. The number of the fallen, when you stand at the site, is strikingly small. They were never a large army, and Khalid's tactics meant the losses were far fewer than the odds promised.

What the survivors understood, and what the Prophet ﷺ pressed upon them, was that the bodies in that ground were not the men. The companions did not grieve the way people grieve who believe death is an ending. The soul is what lives, and these souls were not in the earth at Mu'tah. They were in gardens, provided for, enjoying what Allah had promised. Years later, under the leadership the Prophet ﷺ had himself foretold, the Muslims would return to this region and Allah would grant them victory there in the time of Abu Bakr. But that came later. On the day itself, what was planted in that ground was not defeat. It was a proof that a believer who walks toward death for the sake of Allah is not throwing his life away. He is exchanging it.

[Prophet], do not think of those who have been killed in God's way as dead. They are alive with their Lord, well provided for,

QUR'AN 3:169

What the martyrs of Mu'tah ask of our faith

It is easy to read a battle like this and feel only awe, to picture Ja'far holding the banner between his severed arms and conclude that such men were made of something we are not. That would be a way of excusing ourselves. These were not legends. They were a freed slave who once had a choice between freedom and a poor man he loved, a returning exile glad to be home, and a poet who wept at a verse. They were as

human as we are. What set them apart was not the absence of fear. It was what they did with it.

Look again at Abdullah ibn Rawahah, because he is the one closest to us. He was promised Paradise and still he trembled, because he took Allah seriously enough to weep over the crossing every soul must make. That is not weakness of faith; it is the proof of it. And when his soul pulled back at the edge of death, he did not pretend the fear away and he did not surrender to it. He spoke to himself. He commanded his own heart forward. Most of the battles of our ordinary lives are exactly this: not an army on a field, but a quiet hesitation inside us when Allah asks something that costs us, a flicker of the soul saying not yet, not this. Abdullah's whole life teaches that you do not wait to stop being afraid before you obey. You take your reluctant soul by the hand and walk it toward the good anyway, for the sake of Allah, whether it likes it or not.

Look at Zayd, who chose nearness to the Prophet ﷺ over freedom and family before there was any worldly reward in it, when no eye could see a payoff. That is sincerity, ikhlas, choosing Allah and His Messenger ﷺ not because it impresses anyone or returns anything, but because the heart has recognised what is true and will not let it go. And look at Ja'far, who could have dropped a banner that no one on earth would have blamed him for dropping, and held it up with what was left of him. There are things Allah has given each of us to carry, a prayer, a trust, a responsibility to family or faith, that grow heavy and that no one would fault us for setting down. Their lives ask whether we will hold the banner up anyway, with whatever strength remains, simply because it is His.

And underneath all of it lies the conviction that made the whole day possible: that those killed in the way of Allah are not dead. The men of Mu'tah believed this so completely that they could march three thousand against two hundred thousand and refuse to retreat, because they had genuinely stopped fearing the one thing the world fears most. We are unlikely to be asked for our lives on a battlefield. But we are asked, daily, to spend our time, our comfort, our money, our reputation on things we cannot see and may never be thanked for, and the same promise holds: what you give to Allah is not lost, it is alive with Him, well provided for. The reluctance we feel is our soul, like Abdullah's, hanging back at the edge of a good deed.

So take something small from them into today. Choose one act of obedience your soul is quietly resisting, a prayer you keep delaying, a charity you keep postponing, a wrong you keep meaning to make right, and do it now, for Allah, the way Abdullah marched his unwilling heart forward. Carry one heavy trust without setting it down. Choose Allah once where it brings you nothing in this world, the way Zayd did. That is the path the martyrs of Mu'tah walked, and it is still open. May Allah be pleased with Zayd, with Ja'far, with Abdullah, and with all who fell beside them, and may He plant in our hearts a measure of the certainty that let them walk forward unafraid, and gather us with them in the gardens where they are alive.

This chapter follows the account of the Battle of Mu'tah and its martyrs in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem

(3:169, 19:71). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Hanzala ibn Abi Amir and Jameela

The One Washed by the Angels, and the Wife Who Saw the Heavens Open

There is a kind of story Islam tells that no one would dare invent, because it is too strange to be anything but true. A young man is married one night and dead by the next afternoon. His companions find his body on the field of battle, and while every other corpse around him is caked in dust and blood, his is clean, fresh, dripping as though he had just stepped out of a bath, and carrying the scent of musk. They are baffled. And the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ tells them what their eyes could not see: that the angels had carried this man between the heavens and the earth and washed him with their own hands on a platter of gold.

His name was Hanzala ibn Abi Amir (may Allah be pleased with him). The wife he left after a single night was Jameela bint Abdullah ibn Ubayy (may Allah be pleased with her). To understand the weight of what happened to them, you have to understand the houses they came out of, because both of them came from the worst possible starting point a believer could be given.

Two children of the enemies of the faith

In Madinah, before the Prophet ﷺ ever arrived, there was a man on track to be its king. His name was Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn

Salul, and the tribes of the city had nearly agreed to crown him their leader. Then the Prophet ﷺ came, and the people gave their hearts to him instead, and Abdullah ibn Ubayy never forgave the man who had taken the throne he believed was his. He became the chief of the hypocrites, the munafiqun: those who said with their tongues that they believed while their hearts were full of hatred. He would smile in the Prophet's gatherings and plot against him outside them. He was, by the testimony of revelation itself, the most dangerous internal enemy the young community ever faced.

That man had a daughter. Her name was Jameela.

Abdullah ibn Ubayy had a closest friend, a man named Abu Amir. And Abu Amir's story is, in its own way, even more bitter, because he should have been among the first to believe. He was a deeply religious man before Islam, learned in the scriptures, familiar with the Torah, and he knew with certainty that a prophet of Allah was coming to that land. So he did what a handful of sincere seekers across Arabia had done: he forsook the politics and the idols, he refused the comforts of his people, he wore rough and coarse clothing, and he lived as an ascetic, a worshipper of the one God, waiting. He used to say openly that he was upon the religion of Ibrahim, that he was waiting for the awaited prophet exactly as the Jewish tribes were waiting for him.

He had built his whole life around an arrival. He already looked the part. He had already become the monk and the ascetic.

And then the Prophet ﷺ arose, and Abu Amir turned completely against him. Because the prophet had come from Makkah, from the Quraysh, and not in the shape Abu Amir had imagined for him. His own expectation of what a prophet should look like,

where he should come from, what tribe should carry him, was not met. So this man who had spent his life waiting could not bear that the waiting was over and the gift was not the one he had pictured. He did not simply step aside and reject the message in peace. He crossed over to the other side. He left Madinah, joined the ranks of the disbelievers in Makkah, and took up arms to fight against the very prophet he had spent his life expecting. He fought against the Muslims at the day of Uhud. What an evil end for a man who had begun so close to the truth.

That man had a son. His name was Hanzala.

So here are the two: the daughter of the chief of the hypocrites, and the son of the monk who turned traitor and fought the Prophet ﷺ with his own hands. And these two, against everything their fathers stood for, came to the Prophet ﷺ, believed in him, and were married to one another. The son and the daughter both became companions. The poison of the parents did not pass to the children. Allah pulled them out of those houses the way one pulls a clean thing out of a fire.

The night before, and the morning after

They were married on a single night, and that night was the eve of the battle of Uhud.

The call to march had come. The Prophet ﷺ was preparing the believers to meet the army that was advancing on Madinah, the army that, as it happened, contained Hanzala's own father somewhere in its ranks. And Hanzala was newly wed. He went to the Prophet ﷺ and asked permission to spend that one night with his wife before he rode out, knowing it might be the only night he would ever have with her. The permission was given.

Sit with how ordinary and how human this is. A young man on the edge of war, freshly married, asking for one night. He was not asking to be excused from the fighting. He was not asking to stay behind. He wanted one night, and then he intended to go and give everything. There is no cowardice in that request and no clinging to the world. There is only a man who loved his Lord enough to march in the morning and loved his wife enough to want the one night he was owed.

So Hanzala spent his wedding night with Jameela. And when the morning came, he did not linger. He rose with the day and went straight to the battlefield, still carrying the closeness of the night before, and threw himself into the fighting.

He was a young man, and on the day of Uhud he fought with a bravery that nearly changed history. He cut his way through the enemy until he reached Abu Sufyan himself, the commander of the Makkan army. He knocked Abu Sufyan clean off his horse and stood over him, his weapon raised, a single stroke away from killing the leader of the entire opposing force. Abu Sufyan, who survived that day to embrace Islam many years later, came as close to death at the hands of Hanzala as he ever came in his life. But before Hanzala could finish what he had begun, another man of the Quraysh fell upon him from behind and struck him down. The young groom, married the night before, was killed.

The body that the angels washed

When the fighting ended and the believers walked the field to gather their martyrs, they came upon Hanzala, and they stopped, because something was wrong with the picture in front of them.

Picture the battlefield of Uhud. Every man there was filthy. They had fought in the dust and the heat for hours; they were covered

in dirt and sweat and blood; they did not even have enough water to drink, let alone to wash. And here, in the middle of all of it, lay Hanzala, and he looked as though he had just stepped out of a bath. His body was wet. His hair was washed. There was the scent of musk on him. It was the strangest sight on the whole field, a clean and fragrant body lying among the dust-covered dead, and the companions could not understand it. They came to the Prophet ﷺ, bewildered, and told him: Messenger of Allah, we do not even have water to drink, and yet Hanzala lies there soaked as though he has bathed, and there is a sweetness upon him. What happened to this man?

And the Prophet ﷺ told them what had been hidden from their sight. He said that he had seen Hanzala's body lifted up to the heavens, and that the angels had washed him on a platter of gold, between the sky and the earth.

The angels bathed him. That is why, to this day, his name in the histories of this religion is Ghasil al-Mala'ikah: the one who was washed by the angels. He never received the washing that the living give to the dead, because he had received a washing from the hands of creatures of light, in the open air above the field, while his companions stood below with not a drop of water to spare.

There is a tenderness in this that is easy to rush past. A man left his marriage bed in the morning and was a martyr by the afternoon, and Allah did not let him be buried in the grime of the world. The same young man who had been pure enough to ask for one honest night and then march to his death was lifted up and cleansed by angels. The world had nothing to offer him at the end, not even water. The heavens gave him gold and musk.

Jameela's dream

When word reached Madinah, they came to Jameela, the new wife who was a widow before her marriage was a week old. They asked her, gently, whether anything had happened, whether she had seen or felt anything of that night.

And she told them about a dream.

She said that when she and Hanzala had gone to sleep that night, their wedding night, she had seen a vision. She had seen her husband ascend, lifted up and carried through the heavens. She had watched a gate of heaven open before him, and then she had watched it close behind him once he had passed through.

She had seen it before it happened. Before the battle, before the death, before the angels and the gold and the musk, this young woman had been shown her husband rising through the open heavens and the gate sealing shut behind him, as though the sky itself had received him and kept him. She woke from a wedding into a sign of a funeral, and a sign of a paradise.

And from that one night, Jameela conceived. The single night that Hanzala had asked for, the only night the two of them ever shared, was not barren. She bore him a son, Abdullah ibn Hanzala. And here the line of grace runs on, because that son grew into a man of faith and was himself martyred years later, killed by the troops of Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah. The grandfather had fought against the Prophet ﷺ; the father was washed by the angels; the son, born of a single night, gave his own life for Allah. What began in two houses of enmity ended in a household of martyrs.

What a family becomes when Allah chooses it

Stand back and look at the whole shape of it. The mother of one of the fiercest enemies of the Prophet ﷺ, Abu Jahl, had children who came to Islam. The chief of the hypocrites, Abdullah ibn Ubayy, the man whose treachery the Qur'an itself exposed, had a daughter, Jameela, who became a believing companion and the wife of a martyr washed by angels. The monk who waited his whole life for a prophet and then betrayed him, Abu Amir, had a son, Hanzala, whose body the heavens received with honour.

None of these children inherited the disease of their parents. Guidance, it turns out, is not a thing you are born into or barred from by your lineage. The Prophet ﷺ used to teach that every child is born upon a natural inclination toward its Lord, and that it is the surroundings that bend the child away. Here were children whose surroundings could not have been worse, raised in the very homes of hostility to the faith, and Allah reached into those homes and drew out some of the most luminous believers of the age. The hardness of a father did not seal the heart of a son. The hypocrisy of a father did not stain the daughter. Allah guides whom He wills, and He is not constrained by the soil a person grows in.

That alone should be a mercy to anyone who carries the weight of where they came from. And the miracles that Allah bestowed upon these young believers, the dream, the angels, the golden platter, the scent of musk on the field of the dead, were not given to people with spotless pedigrees. They were given to the children of the enemies of the faith, the moment those children turned their faces toward the truth.

What Hanzala and Jameela's lives ask of our faith

It is easy to read a story like this and treat it as a marvel to be admired from a distance, a thing that happened to extraordinary

people in an extraordinary time. That would be a waste of it. This is not a curiosity. It is a question put directly to your own iman.

Hanzala asked for one night, and then he gave everything. That is the whole shape of a believing life pressed into a single day. He did not pretend he had no attachment to this world; he loved his wife and he wanted his night. But when the morning came, he did not let the sweetness of the night before make him cling. He rose and he went and he gave his life for the sake of Allah, with the warmth of his marriage still on him. Most of us are not asked to die. We are asked for something quieter and, in its way, harder: to enjoy the good things Allah gives us, our families, our homes, our rest, without letting them root us so deeply that we will not rise when He calls us to give. Ask yourself honestly what you are holding so tightly that it would keep you in bed when the duty of your Lord is waiting in the morning. Hanzala's life asks whether you can love the gift and still answer the Giver first.

Then there is the matter of where they came from. If you carry shame about your family, your past, the house you were raised in, the things your parents believed or did, this story is for you specifically. Jameela was the daughter of the chief hypocrite. Hanzala was the son of a traitor to the Prophet ﷺ. And Allah did not hold their fathers' record against them for a single moment. He washed one of them with the hands of angels and showed the other the heavens opening in a dream. Your lineage is not your verdict. Your past is not your sentence. The door of guidance is not closed to anyone because of the people they came from, and the proof of that is a young man washed in gold above a battlefield while his own father fought below for the other side. Whatever soil you grew in, you can turn your face to Allah today, and He is not constrained by your beginnings.

And hold on to what their story does to the idea of loss. By every worldly measure, this was a tragedy. A bride widowed in a week. A young man dead before his marriage was warm. A wife left to raise a fatherless son. But heaven was telling a different story the whole time: a body lifted up and cleansed, a gate opened and a soul received, a single night that bore a believing son who would himself die for Allah. What looked from Madinah like a marriage destroyed was, in the sight of the One who sees, the most successful week of two short lives. This is the promise that should change how you weigh your own hardships: what you give to Allah is never lost, even when the world only sees what was taken from you. The angels were already washing Hanzala while his companions stood there grieving with no water.

So take something small from them into your ordinary life. Love your family and still keep Allah first when the two are weighed against each other. Refuse to let your past tell you that the door is shut. Trust that the thing you sacrifice for your Lord is being recorded somewhere far higher than it is being mourned here. That is how these two lived, in one short night and one final morning, and the heavens answered them in full. May Allah be pleased with Hanzala and with Jameela, may He wash from our hearts what keeps us from Him, and may He gather us with the ones the angels honoured.

This chapter follows the account of Hanzala ibn Abi Amir (RA) and Jameela bint Abdullah ibn Ubayy (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). No Qur'anic verse was directly cited in the source for this account, so none is quoted

here. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abdullah ibn Abdullah ibn Ubayy

The Son of the Chief Hypocrite

There is a kind of faith that costs a person their comfort, and there is a kind that costs them their name. Abdullah ibn Abdullah ibn Ubayy (may Allah be pleased with him) paid the second price. He was born into the most poisoned house in Medina, the son of a man whose treachery the Qur'an itself records, and he grew up beside a father who plotted, slandered, and schemed against the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ for years. By every law of inheritance, of loyalty, of blood, this young man should have been his father's instrument. Instead he became one of the finest of the Ansar, a scribe of revelation, and a soldier who left two of his teeth and part of his nose on the battlefields of Islam.

To understand the weight of what he carried, you have to begin with the man whose blood he carried.

The royal house of a city that no longer had a king

Before the Prophet ﷺ ever set foot in Medina, the city had its own destiny taking shape, and at the center of it stood Abdullah ibn Ubayy, the father. The tribes of the city had grown weary of their endless feuds, and they had nearly settled on a single man to be their king. The crown was practically resting on Abdullah ibn Ubayy's head. Medina, which the Arabs called Yathrib in those days, was about to have one ruler, and that ruler was to be him.

Then the Messenger of Allah ﷺ arrived, and the people embraced him, and the throne that had been all but promised quietly dissolved. The king who was never crowned never forgave it. From that day forward he wore Islam like a borrowed cloak, mouthing belief in public while his heart stayed exactly where it had always been: on the power he felt had been stolen from him. He became, in the words of the seerah, the chief of the hypocrites of Medina, and a significant portion of the Qur'an came down concerning the corruption and the danger of this one man and those who followed his lead.

His record is a catalogue of harm. He was behind the withdrawal of a large body of fighters on the way to Uhud, peeling away men from the Prophet's army at the most fragile possible moment. He was at the heart of the slander that scarred the household of the Prophet ﷺ. He worked to infiltrate and destabilize the believers at the time of the trench, at Khandaq. One horrible thing after another after another traces back to him.

And the son of this man was meant to be the heir. The boy was being groomed to be the prince of Yathrib, the successor to a king. He was raised in the closest thing the city had to a royal family. He could read and write, a rare and prized skill in that society, the kind of education reserved for someone destined to rule.

The son who chose the other side

When the message came, Abdullah did not hesitate, and he did not calculate. He embraced Islam immediately and sincerely, and he gave himself completely to the Prophet ﷺ. His name had been Hubab, and the Prophet ﷺ changed it to Abdullah, servant of Allah, the name by which history remembers him.

What he chose was not a quiet, private faith. He attended the battles with the Prophet ﷺ, all of them. He was at Badr, and that alone places him among a small and honored group, because not even all of the Ansar were given the rank of having stood at Badr. He did not flee on the day of Uhud, the very day his own father led men away. He was present at Khandaq, where his father worked to undermine from within. He gave his pledge to the Prophet ﷺ under the tree at Hudaibiyah, among the believers whom Allah praised for that oath.

And because he could read and write, the prince who never became a prince became something far greater: one of the scribes of the Prophet ﷺ. Some of the books of seerah record that he was among those who wrote down the Qur'an as it was revealed. Sit with that for a moment. The son of the chief hypocrite, pen in hand, recording the very revelation that exposed his father's treachery, writing out in his own script the verses that named the plots and the lies of the man who raised him.

He bled for this faith the way few did. In battle he lost part of his nose and two of his teeth. The Prophet ﷺ permitted him to restore what was lost with gold, to fasten the missing part of his nose with gold and replace his teeth with gold as well, by whatever means the wounds were treated. The scholars later drew a ruling from this, that the use of gold to repair the body is permissible, and they took it from this companion's wounds. So Abdullah walked through the rest of his life with gold on his nose and gold in his mouth, the visible marks of a man who had stood where his father had run.

The Prophet ﷺ trusted him so completely that he would appoint him a commander in battle, an emir over other men. Consider the

paradox the seerah lays bare. Your father is the most dangerous man in the city. Your father is the one who makes people abandon the Prophet ﷺ. And you are the one who is proven, time and again, to be at the Prophet's side when it matters most. The father pulled men away. The son would not be pulled.

The verse that named his father

His father did not stop. He could not stop. On one of the campaigns, when a quarrel broke out and tempers flared, Abdullah ibn Ubayy seized on it as the opening he had been waiting for. He gathered his words like a knife and said that once they returned to Medina, the honored would expel the humiliated, casting himself as the honored one and the Prophet ﷺ as the one to be driven out. It was treason spoken aloud, the plain declaration of a man who believed he had finally found the moment to overthrow the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

Allah answered him in revelation, recording his arrogance and overturning it in the same breath:

They say, 'Once we return to Medina the powerful will drive out the weak,' but power belongs to God, to His Messenger, and to the believers, though the hypocrites do not know this.

QUR'AN 63:8

For most of his life this man had kept his hypocrisy sly and hidden, never quite stepping into the open. Now he had stepped into it, and he had been caught. He was guilty of treason of the highest order, the kind of crime that in any society of that age was answered with execution. The man had explicitly said he would remove the Prophet ﷺ and seize the city. By every expectation, his life was forfeit.

A son's terrible request

What happened next is one of the most extraordinary conversations in the whole of the seerah.

Abdullah, the son, came to the Prophet ﷺ. He had heard what everyone assumed: that his father would be put to death for what he had said. And the request he carried was not a plea for mercy. He did not ask the Prophet ﷺ to spare his father. He said, in effect, if you are truly going to do this, then give the order to me. Let me be the one.

You might hear that and recoil, and wonder whether this was the rage of a son turning on his father, whether the Prophet ﷺ had somehow stirred such hatred in him. It was the opposite. Listen to his reasoning, and you hear a heart torn open by two loves at once.

He told the Prophet ﷺ that everyone knew there was no son who loved his father more than he loved his. He had always been obedient to his father, had always treated him with kindness and honor. That was exactly the problem. He said that if the Prophet ﷺ ordered someone else to carry out the execution, then he, Abdullah, would have to go on living beside the man who had killed his father. And he did not know whether he could bear to look at that man. He did not know whether he could forgive him. He feared what he might do. He feared that the old ignorance, the jahiliyyah, might rise up in him, that some animal pull of blood and honor might overtake him, and that he would strike down a believer to avenge his father, and so kill a Muslim and ruin himself. To protect his own iman from that, he would rather hold the burden himself. If his father must die, let the order come to his own hand, so that no believer would ever stand within reach of his grief.

Here was a man so afraid of betraying his faith that he was willing to do the hardest thing a human being can imagine, rather than risk letting his love of family drag him back into the darkness he had left.

And what did the Prophet ﷺ say? He refused. There would be no execution. "No," he told him in substance, "we will keep his company well, and treat him with the best of character, for as long as he remains among us." And to the son he gave a gentle and astonishing instruction: that is still your father. Treat him well. I did not come to turn you against your father.

The mercy here runs in two directions at once. The Prophet ﷺ spared the life of the man who had tried to take his own, and in the same moment he protected the son's heart, refusing to let this young believer be hardened or broken, refusing to let faith become a reason to abandon kindness to a parent.

The gate of Medina

The story keeps turning. When the army drew near to Medina, Abdullah ibn Ubayy, the father, found that the road home was blocked, and the man blocking it was his own son. Abdullah stood at the gate of the city and would not let his father pass. He told him plainly: the Prophet ﷺ is the honored one, and you are the humiliated one, and you said what you said about the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and you will not enter until you acknowledge it.

It is a stunning scene. The son uses his father's own poisoned words against him, the very boast that Allah had thrown back at him in the Qur'an, and turns it into a wall at the city gate. The young man who could not bear the thought of any harm coming to his father by another's hand was also the young man who

would not let his father walk back into Medina carrying contempt for the Prophet ﷺ. His love for his father was real. His love for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was greater. He held both, and when they collided, he knew which one ruled.

The shirt, and the prayer over a grave

And still the story is not finished, because real lives are never simple, and this one was full of human complication to the very end.

When Abdullah ibn Ubayy finally died, his son Abdullah was devastated. Whatever the man had been to the believers, he was still a father to his son, and grief does not consult our principles before it arrives. So the son came to the Prophet ﷺ with two requests that, on their face, defy belief.

First, he asked for the Prophet's own shirt, to wrap his father's body in it as a burial garment. This was the man who had slandered the Prophet ﷺ, who had plotted to kill him more than once, who had worked from the first days to tear the young city apart. And the Prophet ﷺ took off his shirt and handed it to him and told him to wrap his father in it.

Then the son asked for more. He asked the Prophet ﷺ to come and lead the funeral prayer over his father, and to seek forgiveness for him. And the Prophet ﷺ rose to do it. Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) tried to stop him, astonished, that this man, of all men, would receive the Prophet's prayer. But the Messenger of Allah ﷺ went out toward the grave of the man who had spent years as his enemy.

It was then that Allah revealed the limit of it, the verse that drew the line not at mercy but at the truth of the heart:

It makes no difference [Prophet] whether you ask forgiveness for them or not: God will not forgive them even if you ask seventy times, because they reject God and His Messenger. God does not guide those who rebel against Him.

QUR'AN 9:80

The forgiveness was withheld not because the Prophet's mercy fell short, but because the man had never been a believer at all. He had been, from beginning to end, an opponent who infiltrated and destabilized from within. The son's grief was honored. The father's heart was known. And between the two stood a Prophet ﷺ whose kindness reached even toward the worst of men, while the final judgment remained with Allah alone.

What this son's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read this story and feel only wonder at the strangeness of it: the hypocrite's son who became a hero, the gold teeth, the shirt, the prayer at the grave. But this life is not a curiosity to be marveled at from a distance. It is a question pressed against our own iman, and the question is sharp.

Abdullah ibn Abdullah ibn Ubayy was handed every reason to follow the easy, expected path. His inheritance was a crown. His father was power. His whole upbringing pointed him toward becoming the next prince of his city. And he set all of it down, the throne, the name, the approval of his own house, and walked toward a Prophet ﷺ whom his father hated, because he had recognized the truth and decided that the truth mattered more than blood. That is the first thing his life asks of you. What are you keeping because it was handed to you, and would you have the courage to lay it down for the sake of Allah if it stood between you and Him? Faith for Allah's sake alone, ikhlas,

sometimes means disappointing the very people who raised you, not out of rebellion, but because you love Allah more than you love their approval.

Then look at what he feared most. He did not fear his father's enemy. He did not fear death, his own or anyone's. He feared his own heart. He was terrified that grief and lineage and the old pull of jahiliyyah might rise up and drag him into sin, and so he asked to carry the heaviest burden himself rather than risk it. There is a man who knew the real battle is not out there but inside. Most of us guard our reputations, our comfort, our plans. How many of us guard our hearts the way he guarded his, watching with dread the places where our own emotions could pull us away from Allah? Take that home with you. Know the situations that weaken your faith, the relationships, the angers, the loyalties, and build a wall at the gate before they get inside.

And see how he held two loves without letting the lesser one rule. He loved his father truly, and he never pretended otherwise, and the Prophet ﷺ never asked him to. But when love of family and love of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ stood against each other, he knew which came first, and he acted on it at the city gate. This is the order our own hearts are meant to keep. Allah and His Messenger ﷺ first, and then, beneath that, kindness to parents, mercy to family, the keeping of every tie. He did not abandon his father; he honored him in his life and grieved him in his death and buried him with his own hands. He simply would not place his father above his Lord. That is a balance worth praying for.

So carry one concrete thing from this son into your ordinary days. Examine the loyalties of your own life and ask, honestly, whether any of them have quietly slipped above your loyalty to Allah, and if one has, set it back in its place this week, gently and

without cruelty, the way he did. Guard the one part of your heart you know is weak. And when you must choose between pleasing the people you love and pleasing the One who made you, remember a young man who chose his Lord and lost nothing that was worth keeping. May Allah be pleased with Abdullah ibn Abdullah ibn Ubayy, who carried a poisoned name and made it pure, and may He grant us the courage to love Him above all that we have inherited.

This chapter follows the account of Abdullah ibn Abdullah ibn Ubayy (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (63:8, 9:80). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Amr ibn al-Jamuh

The One Who Walked Into Jannah

There is a kind of person we are quietly tempted to write off. He is old. He is set in his ways. He is so devoted to the wrong thing that we assume the right thing will never reach him. And then Allah turns his heart, late and all at once, and he runs toward what younger and abler people are trying to avoid. Amr ibn al-Jamuh (may Allah be pleased with him) was that person. He came to Islam an old man with a limp and a wooden idol he loved, and he left this world a martyr who begged for the front line, certain that on the other side of it he would walk on two whole feet forever.

To understand the size of what he gave up, and the size of what he gained, you have to meet him before the light reached him.

The chief who loved his idol

Amr ibn al-Jamuh was the chief of Banu Salima, one of the tribes of the Ansar in Madinah. By the time the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ came to the city, Amr was already in his sixties, one of the few elders of Yathrib who had survived the long civil wars between Aws and Khazraj. He had survived them, in part, because he was known as a peacemaker, a man who mended what others broke. He was wealthy. He was generous. When quarrels flared between the tribes, his was the hand that reached in to settle them.

There is something worth noticing about the idol worship of Madinah, something different from Makkah. In Makkah, the idols were tangled up with money and status; they were a trade, a business, a way of pulling in the tribes and the pilgrims and the profit that came with them. In Madinah it ran deeper and, in its own tragic way, more sincerely. The people there seemed genuinely devoted to their idols, with little to gain from them in this world. And no one embodied that devotion more than Amr.

He kept a personal idol in his home, an idol he had named Manat. (This is not the famous Manat of the Qur'an; this was his own private god, carved and kept.) Being the chief, he made it the centerpiece of his house. When the elders gathered with him, they paid their respects to it. And Amr was lavish with it beyond all reason: he perfumed it, he dressed it, he draped jewelry on it. You can almost see the scene, an old nobleman fussing over a piece of carved wood as though it could feel his care. He loved that idol. When Islam came to Madinah, Amr had no political quarrel with the Prophet ﷺ. He simply was not interested. He was happy with his religion, and he had no intention of leaving it.

A household that believed in secret

What Amr did not know was that his own home had already turned. His wife, Hind, had embraced Islam. So had his three sons, along with most of the Ansar. One of his sons, Mu'adh, was a close friend of another young companion named Mu'adh ibn Jabal. They kept their Islam from the old man, because they knew what it would do to him. They knew how much the idol meant to him, and they feared the news would break his heart. So instead of confronting him, they tried, patiently and lovingly, to warm him to the idea.

Hind began to poke at it gently. Every time she raised the question of Islam, Amr gave the same answer: we are pleased with our religion, we want nothing else. He noticed, too, how much time the young companions spent in his house, how close his sons were drifting to that man Muhammad ﷺ, and at one point he warned them to be careful, to watch how he himself felt about all of this before they committed, to go and listen to the message themselves and only then decide.

His wife seized on exactly that. She suggested, almost casually, that they actually do the work of finding out what this man had brought. Did he want to hear what their son Mu'adh had learned? Amr panicked for a moment, thinking his son had converted. No, she reassured him, the boy had only been listening, only picked something up. Let him recite it for you. So Mu'adh came, and his father asked him to recite what he had learned from the Prophet ﷺ.

The boy recited from Surah Yusuf.

The Qur'an is all beautiful, but there was a wisdom in choosing that surah, the long, unhurried story of a son and a father and a mercy that outlasts every betrayal. Amr listened. He was an old man, still in love with his idol, and even he could not stop the words from landing. How beautiful, he said. How perfect these words are. And then a question that already had a door swinging open inside it: is everything he teaches you like this? Is it all this beautiful? His son answered, even better than this, my father. I am only giving you a taste of what I have learned.

The night the idol could not stand

Amr was moved, but he was not yet free. When his son urged him, why not embrace this religion as all your people have, the

old chief gave an answer that tells you exactly where his heart still lived: not until I consult Manat. I have to ask my idol first.

So he went to it. He stood before the carved wood and spoke to it almost as a worried friend would: people are leaving the old religion, and I want no god but you, so tell me, do you have any answer to this man who comes saying you are not a god at all? Any response? The idol, of course, said nothing. And in that silence something honest stirred in him. He decided he would wait. Perhaps, he thought, I have angered him somehow, but I will leave him for now and wait for guidance.

His sons saw their moment. By night they slipped in, took Manat, and threw it down, dragging it through the filth and leaving it tossed aside. In the morning Amr found his god in ruins. He was furious. He gathered it up, washed it clean, perfumed it again, and then, almost touchingly, hung a sword around its neck. Defend yourself, he told it. Next time they come, whoever they are, defend yourself.

They came again. This time the sons took the idol, untied the sword, lashed Manat to the carcass of a dead dog, and threw the whole thing into a well. When Amr went looking and finally found his god roped to a rotting animal at the bottom of a pit, something in him broke open and cleared at the same time. He looked at it and spoke words that have outlived him by fourteen centuries. By God, he said, if you were truly a god, you would not be found tied to a dog, dead in a well. A real god does not end up like this.

He had spent decades on that idol. It took one ruined morning to see it for what it was.

The simplest faith, and the front line he was denied

Amr went to his people, the people who followed him because he was their chief. Are you not upon what I am upon, he asked them, the way a leader expects his tribe to follow his lead. They said yes, you are our master. So he said: then I bear witness to you that I believe in what Muhammad ﷺ has been given. With that, the chief of Banu Salima became a Muslim, and many of his people with him.

You might expect that a man who resisted so long, who clung so hard to his idol, would always carry some coldness in his faith, that the sweetness would never fully reach him. The opposite happened. Amr tasted the sweetness of iman completely. He was old and he was simple, and his understanding of the whole religion came down to something a child could grasp and a scholar could spend a lifetime trying to reach: believe in Allah, pray, and get to Jannah. He did not become a jurist. He did not become a scribe or a famous narrator. He had one clean, blazing intention, I will worship Allah and I will go to Jannah, and he poured into Allah the very same devotion he had once poured into his idol, only now it was aimed at the One who deserved it.

That devotion was tested almost immediately, and from an unexpected direction. The very sons who had schemed so lovingly to bring him to Islam now schemed to keep him safe. When the Battle of Badr came, they sat their father down and would not let him go. He was too old. He walked with a severe limp, leaning on a cane, able to rely on only one leg. They could not bear to see him on a battlefield. And Amr was devastated, because he had heard the Prophet ﷺ praise the people of Badr, and he had been kept from that praise by his own children. You stopped me from Jannah on the day of Badr, he told them. By God, if I get the chance, I will enter Jannah.

The plea of an old man

The chance came at Uhud, and by then he was even older and his disability even worse. When the Prophet ﷺ called the believers forth to fight in the way of Allah, holding before them the promise of a Garden vaster than the heavens and the earth, many men were looking for a reason to stay behind. Amr was looking for any reason to go. He volunteered at once. I am ready, he said.

His children sat him down again. Please, they begged, Allah has given you an excuse. You are old, you are not obligated, stay home. And here is the purity of this man, the thing that should stop us in our reading and make us look hard at our own hearts. He did not argue about his rights. He did not lecture them about courage. He went to the Prophet ﷺ in tears, an old man weeping, and said: my children are stopping me from going to Jannah.

That was how he saw the battlefield. Not as danger to be survived but as a door he was being shut out of. His sons explained to the Prophet ﷺ that they only feared for him, that they knew he could not handle it. And the Prophet ﷺ, hearing the old man's longing, told them: do not forbid him. Perhaps Allah will grant him the martyrdom he is seeking.

Hurry towards your Lord's forgiveness and a Garden as wide as the heavens and earth prepared for the righteous,

QUR'AN 3:133

So he went. His wife Hind, who was herself the sister of the famous companion Abdullah ibn Amr ibn Haram, remembered the morning he left. She watched him pick up his weapons and his shield, turn toward the door, and make a single prayer: O Allah,

do not turn me back. He did not pray to come home. He prayed never to be sent home.

Walking into Jannah without a limp

Before the fighting, Amr came to the Prophet ﷺ with one more question, and it is the most tender exchange of his whole life. O Messenger of Allah, he asked, if I fight in this battle and I am killed, do you see me walking on both of my feet in Jannah? This was the wound he carried in his body and his heart, the leg that would not hold him, the cane he could not put down, the limp that had nearly kept him from this very day. And the Prophet ﷺ told him: yes.

Imagine it. This man, who had once been a kind of quiet joke among some for his fussing over an idol, now dragging himself forward across the field of Uhud, his son Khallad fighting bravely in another part of the battle, and the old man with one good leg pushing into the thick of it, calling out the only thing left in him: I want Jannah, I want Jannah, I want Jannah, until he was struck down and killed for the sake of Allah.

Afterward the Prophet ﷺ walked among the martyrs of Uhud. He stopped at Amr ibn al-Jamuh, looked at him, and said the thing the old man had been promised, now spoken over his body as though it were already done: it is as if I am looking at you walking on your two feet, sound and whole, in Jannah. In another narration, simpler still: I saw him walking in Jannah, and he was not limping anymore. The cane was gone. The leg was healed. The man who had begged not to be turned back from the battlefield was now walking, on two strong feet, into the Garden he had wanted more than his own life.

He was buried in a single shroud together with Abdullah ibn Amr ibn Haram, his wife's brother, two martyrs of Uhud laid side by side. May Allah be pleased with them both.

What Amr's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a story like this and feel only a clean, distant admiration, the old man on the battlefield, the healed leg, the beautiful ending. But Amr ibn al-Jamuh did not begin as a hero. He began as exactly the kind of person we are quietest about and slowest to expect anything from: elderly, attached, comfortable in the wrong thing. His life is not here to be admired from a safe distance. It is here to ask something of our own iman.

He let the truth in even when it cost him the thing he loved most. He had built decades of his identity around that idol, and when he finally saw it for what it was, he did not cling out of pride or sunk cost; he turned, completely. Ask yourself honestly what you are still consulting before you obey Allah, what small idol of habit or image or comfort you keep washing off and standing back up. Amr's gift was that, in the end, he was willing to see clearly and then act on what he saw. Faith begins exactly there, in the willingness to let go of what cannot save you the moment you recognize it cannot.

He worshipped with a simple, burning sincerity, and it carried him further than knowledge carries most people. He never became a scholar. He had one intention, polished until it shone: I will worship Allah, and I will go to Jannah, for His sake. That is ikhlas in its plainest form, and it is available to anyone, the learned and the unlettered alike. You do not need a library to love Allah purely. You need a heart that has decided who it is for. The devotion he had wasted on wood, he redirected to the One who made him, and Allah accepted it and crowned it.

He longed for nearness to Allah more than he feared for his own safety. When his sons offered him every excuse to stay home, he wept, not because he might be hurt, but because he might be left out. Most of us spend our energy looking for permission to do less for Allah. Amr spent his looking for any way to do more. That is the hope and the love and the fear of Allah all braided into one, a man who saw the battlefield as a door to his Lord and could not bear to have it closed. In your own ordinary life, the same longing can show up in small forms: choosing the prayer over the extra sleep, the charity over the easy excuse, the harder good over the permitted ease, not because you must, but because you want nearness to Him.

And here is what should lift the heart of every reader who feels they have come to Allah late, or weakly, or with too much wasted behind them. Amr came old. He came limping. He came after a lifetime spent on the wrong god. And Allah did not hold his late start against him; He gave him a martyr's death and the Prophet's own testimony that he was walking whole in Jannah. Whatever you have wasted, whatever you started worshipping before you knew better, the door is not closed. So take one thing from this old man into your week. Name the idol you keep propping up, and let it fall. Aim one act of worship purely at Allah, with no audience but Him. And ask Him, as Amr did with his hand on the door, not to turn you back. May Allah be pleased with Amr ibn al-Jamuh, heal in us every limp of the heart, and let us walk, sound and whole, into the Garden he was promised.

This chapter follows the account of Amr ibn al-Jamuh (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (3:133). Where the

histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Umar ibn al-Khattab

The Shepherd Who Feared the Standing

There is a man who, by every measure the world keeps, had arrived. He commanded almost every great city of his age, and armies moved at his word. The Qur'an itself had descended in agreement with his opinions, and the Prophet ﷺ had called him a man whom the angels addressed. If anyone had earned the right to feel he belonged at the top, it was Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him). And yet, from the first day he led the believers to his last breath in the dirt of Madinah, he never once felt worthy of it. That is the strange secret of his greatness: he was the finest leader this ummah knew after its prophets because he was terrified of leading it.

To understand him, watch him not on a throne, for he had none, but in the dark streets of Madinah, and at the moment of his death.

The lowest step

When Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) appointed him, Umar inherited a title that did not yet exist. Abu Bakr had been the Khalifa, the successor, of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ; to call Umar the successor of the successor, and to stretch that out generation after generation, would have grown absurd. So a new name was found, and Umar was the first ever addressed by it: Amir al-Mu'minin, the commander of the believers.

He gave his first address from the pulpit of the Prophet ﷺ. When he reached the step on which the Prophet ﷺ used to stand, he refused it: "I am not worthy to stand where the Messenger of Allah ﷺ stood." He stepped down to where Abu Bakr had stood, and refused that too, descending to the very lowest step. From there, beneath the place of both men he loved, he made his first supplication as their leader: "O Allah, I am weak, so make me strong. O Allah, I am harsh, so make me gentle. O Allah, I am stingy at times, so make me generous."

This is the man whose rule became a byword for justice so complete that a tyrant would tremble at his name, while the weakest in his lands never had cause to fear him. The more he lowered himself, the higher Allah raised him.

Afraid of the question

What frightened Umar was not his enemies. It was a question he believed Allah would one day ask him about every soul in his care. He once asked Salman al-Farsi (may Allah be pleased with him) whether he had become a king or a caliph. If he took from the wealth of the Muslims even a single dirham that was not his right, Salman answered, he was a king; but if he upheld their rights and never cheated them, a caliph. Umar wept, and sought refuge in Allah.

That fear reached even to the animals. He laid his hand on an exhausted camel once and said he feared Allah would make it testify against him on the Day of Judgment, and swore that if a sheep died on the far bank of the Euphrates, he was afraid he would be asked about it. The verse he recited more than any other is itself a window into a man who lived bent under the thought of standing before his Lord:

For those who fear [the time when they will] stand before their Lord there are two gardens.

QUR'AN 55:46

He ran from that fear by working. By day you would not find him except walking the markets and alleys of his people; by night, you would not find him asleep.

He was also a man of consultation, though a man the Qur'an had agreed with and the Prophet ﷺ had praised might be forgiven for trusting only himself. Instead his rule was built on shura. He would consult the people of Badr, then the people of the Qur'an who had memorised and lived it, and then, remarkably, the young, because he saw a sharpness and a purity in their thinking.

The year of ashes

Then came the famine the histories call the Year of Ashes, when the land turned grey and barren and the people of Madinah buried tens of the dead each day, and starving animals attacked people for food. In the middle of it stood a caliph who refused to be spared anything his people were not spared.

Umar took an oath that he would not taste butter, or milk, or meat, until the people could afford them, and his own body changed colour from what he denied himself. His companions grew afraid, and not of the famine itself. They feared losing Umar to it, that he would die from sheer grief over the Muslims, and they prayed for it to lift not from their own hunger, but because losing him would have been worse than losing anyone, including themselves. He used to beg, "O Allah, do not let the destruction of the ummah of Muhammad ﷺ come at my hands."

People felt sorry for him and tried to feed him, and he refused. As he sat one day his stomach rumbled aloud from hunger, and he spoke to it: "Rumble or do not rumble. By Allah, you will not be filled until the children of the Muslims are filled." He walked into his own house once, saw his son eating a piece of watermelon, and chased the boy to take it from his hand, until his wife said the child had bought it with his own money. Even then he would not have it, for the children of the ummah could not yet eat such things. "How can I be a shepherd of this flock," he said, "if I am not touched by what touches my flock?"

This was no act for the famine alone. The most powerful man on earth lived with fourteen patches in a single garment, and when he ran out of means he asked his companions, carefully, what he was even entitled to draw from the treasury. They told him two meals and a cloak for each season, and he accepted it gladly: "I am only one of the Muslims."

The man at the door of the tent

His nights are what he is best remembered for. The patrols are not merely beautiful stories; they are the picture of a man who refused to govern from a distance.

Once he kept disappearing to a house on the edge of the city. A companion followed him, and in the morning, after Umar had gone, knocked. An old blind woman answered. Who is the man who comes to you, she was asked. She did not know his name. "He is a man who likes to do good," she said. "He cooks for me and cleans my house, then leaves." For how long? For years. The most powerful man in the world had been slipping out for years to serve a woman who never learned he was the caliph.

Another night he came upon a small tent, a frightened man outside it, and from within the cries of a woman in pain. The man waved him off, but Umar pressed gently until he learned the wife was giving birth with no one to help her. So Umar went home, and the way he asked his wife to come is itself a lesson. He did not say, get up, we have work to do. He said, "Do you want a good deed that Allah is offering you?" He carried the flour and fat himself, walked through the dark with her, and while she went in to help, knelt and built the fire and cooked. The traveller had no idea who he was, until the baby was born and Umar's wife called out, "Commander of the believers, give your friend the good news." Come to me tomorrow, Umar told the stunned man, and there will be help for the child.

But the patrols did more than comfort. Umar made policy from them. He found an old blind Jewish man begging, who said the protection tax had grown too heavy in his old age. Umar took him home, cared for him, and ordered the treasury to keep him and the elderly among the People of the Book from ever begging again: "We took from him when he was young, and abandoned him when he was old. That cannot be."

He passed a house where a child cried while its mother held it but would not nurse it. He scolded her, not knowing who she was, and she answered that Umar gave a larger treasury payment to a weaned child than to a nursing one, so she was trying to starve the baby off the breast early. Umar was crushed. The next dawn he led Fajr weeping so hard the worshippers could not make out a word he recited, saying over and over, "Woe to you, son of al-Khattab. How many children have you harmed?" That day he changed the law, so every child received its share from birth. On another night, hearing a woman grieve in

verse for a husband sent to the frontier, he set the law that no soldier would be kept from his family longer than four months.

And one night he overheard a widow telling her daughter to dilute the milk with water before selling it. The girl reminded her mother that the commander of the believers had forbidden it. "And where is Umar now?" the mother said. The daughter answered, "If Umar does not see us, the Lord of Umar sees us." Umar marked the door and went home. He did not punish the mother or even look at the girl. He married that girl of taqwa to one of his sons, and from her line would come a descendant he had once seen in a dream, a man who would fill the earth with justice after injustice. The blessing Allah placed in one just thought reached generations Umar would never meet.

The door that would be broken

For all its golden order, Umar knew his time was a door holding something back. He once asked who remembered what the Prophet ﷺ had said about the great trials, the fitan that would strike the ummah wave upon wave. A companion answered that between the people and those trials stood a closed door. Would it be opened, Umar asked, or broken? It will be broken, the man said. Umar wept, buried his face in his hands, and left, and the companions did not understand. Later it was explained: Umar was the door. If a door is opened, it can be shut again; if it is shattered, it never closes. His death would not be a quiet succession but the breaking of a barrier.

He carried two supplications in those final years, and both seemed impossible. "O Allah, grant me martyrdom in Your cause, and let me die in the city of Your Prophet ﷺ." His daughter Hafsa asked how he could die a martyr in Madinah, where no battles were fought. "If Allah wills it," he said, "He will make it

happen." And a second: "O Allah, do not let me be killed at the hands of someone who has prostrated to You." He was asking, in effect, for three irreconcilable things: to be killed by a disbeliever, as a martyr, in the safest city on earth.

There was a captive Persian smith in Madinah, Abu Lu'lu'ah, who complained that the levy on his earnings was too high. Umar weighed the complaint, found the levy fair, but told his governor to ease the man's burden anyway. It was not enough. Passing him one day, Umar admired his craft and asked him to make something. "I will make you something the whole world will hear about," the man said. Umar walked off laughing: "He has just promised to kill me." When his companions offered to seize the man, Umar refused to act on a suspicion, and left it to the decree of Allah.

The dreams gathered around him. Abu Musa al-Ash'ari (may Allah be pleased with him) saw the Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr at a distance, calling Umar across to them. Then Umar himself dreamed that a rooster pecked him twice, and read it as his own death. On his last pilgrimage, the tenth in ten years, the companions watched him raise his hands at Arafah: "O Allah, I have grown old, my strength has left me, and Your ummah has spread across the earth. Take me back to You while You are pleased with me."

A face in the dirt

He returned from that Hajj and gave a single sermon before the end. Then, before dawn on a Friday in Dhul-Hijjah, he came to lead Fajr in the Prophet's mosque, sixty-three years old, the very age at which the Prophet ﷺ had died. He straightened the rows himself, then began, reciting Surah Yusuf, which he loved to read in Fajr, weeping as he read it.

Abu Lu'lu'ah had hidden a two-edged dagger, poisoned at both points, and chosen Fajr for its darkness. As Umar went down into prostration, the man struck, stabbing him as many as nine times, the worst wound beneath the navel. Umar gasped, "The dog has killed me," and even then, in the first instant of the blow, what rose to his lips was the Qur'an: that the command of Allah is a decree fulfilled. Most of the mosque, in the dark, thought only that their imam had forgotten to rise.

His concern as he lay bleeding was not himself. He gripped the leg of Abdur-Rahman ibn Awf and told him to finish the prayer. They carried him to his son's house, and he lost consciousness, his son Abdullah crying, "O my father, O my father." When at last he opened his eyes after sunrise, his first words were a question: "Did the people pray?" Yes, he was told. "Praise be to Allah," he said. "There is no share of Islam for the one who abandons the prayer." Then he asked for water, and they thought he meant to drink, but he made wudu and completed the Fajr he had been struck down in the midst of.

Then he asked who had killed him. The Persian, they said, the man he had suspected. "Praise be to Allah," Umar said, "that the one who killed me was not someone who prostrated to Allah." His du'a had been answered, all three impossible parts at once. The doctor told him plainly he would not live and should settle his affairs. He ordered his debts paid, and when it became clear how little he owned, told his son to pay from the family's own wealth. The most powerful man on earth died owing money he could not repay.

He appointed a council of six to choose the next leader, and kept his own family out of it. When they urged him to name his son Abdullah, so like him, he refused: "This affair is enough for one

man from my family." He sent Abdullah to our mother Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her), instructing him to say only that Umar, not the commander of the believers, sent his salaam: would she permit him to be buried beside the Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr, in her own room, the place she had always imagined for herself? If she hesitated, that was her right; only if she freely agreed was it her kindness. She wept, and gave up her own resting place for him. When Abdullah returned with the news, Umar made him ask once more, in case she had only yielded to the emotion of the moment.

Companions came and praised him, and it frightened him. "Will you bear witness to this before Allah?" he asked them, so heavy was his fear of being asked about the people in his care. And in his last moments he asked his son to do one thing more. "Lay my cheek on the ground." Abdullah did not want to. "Take my head off your lap," Umar told him, "and put my face in the dirt. If this is a face bound for the Fire, you do not want it resting on you. And if it is bound for the Garden, the pillows of the Garden are softer than your thigh." So his son laid the cheek of the commander of the believers against the earth, and there, humbled into the dust, hoping only that Allah might look on a lowly servant and have mercy, Umar ibn al-Khattab died. The man who had once set out to kill the Prophet ﷺ was buried beside him, his head at the shoulder of Abu Bakr, whose head lay at the shoulder of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

What Umar's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read a life like this as a chronicle of justice and good character, to admire the night patrols and the patched garment and move on. That would be to miss what the man was actually doing, and what he is asking of us.

Look again at the thread running through every scene: he was afraid of standing before Allah. Not afraid of failure, not of his reputation, but of the question Allah would put to him about every soul in his charge. That fear did not paralyse him; it sent him into the streets at night. And it is meant for ordinary people who lead nothing larger than a household, a team, a single dependent. You too are a shepherd over something, and you too will be asked. The fear of that standing is not a burden to escape; it is the very thing that turns a person outward, toward the people in their care. Let the thought of being questioned by Allah make you gentle with those beneath you, and attentive to the ones you would otherwise overlook.

See, too, that he could not bear to enjoy what his people could not, and spoke to his own hungry stomach and told it to wait. It is not that comfort is forbidden, but that a believing heart finds it hard to feast in private while others go without, and does something about it for the sake of Allah, not to be seen. Give something this week that no one is asking of you, quietly, for Allah alone.

And consider the girl who diluted no milk in the dark, because she knew the Lord of Umar was watching even when Umar was not. That is the whole of sincerity, ikhlas, and it changed the course of a family for generations. Most of what undoes us is the gap between who we are in public and who we are when no one can see. Ask whether your worship, your honesty, your restraint hold steady in the rooms where only Allah is present. That is where iman either lives or dies.

Finally, do not pass over how he died: a martyr, in the Prophet's city, killed by a hand that had never bowed to Allah, three impossibilities granted at once. He had made that du'a for years

while his own daughter thought it absurd, certain that if Allah willed it, He would make a way. That is what trust in Allah's promise looks like: you keep asking for the thing that seems impossible, and leave the how to Him. And then watch the end of the most powerful man on earth, his cheek pressed into the dirt, pleading not on the strength of his deeds but on the hope of mercy. If Umar feared for himself and threw himself on Allah's mercy, then our own deeds are no place to rest our confidence either. We work, and then we hope in Him.

So take one thing from him into a single ordinary day. Fear the standing before Allah enough to be kind to someone in your charge. Give one gift no one will ever know about. Be the same person in the dark as in the light. Keep asking Allah, with truthfulness in your heart, for the thing you have almost given up on. That is how the shepherd lived, and the door is still open to anyone who wants to walk through it. May Allah be pleased with Umar ibn al-Khattab, gather us in the company of the Prophet ﷺ and his two companions, and grant us a measure of the fear and the trust that carried him from the lowest step of the pulpit to the dust beside his beloved.

This chapter follows the account of Umar ibn al-Khattab (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (55:46); the phrase Umar recited when struck is from 33:38. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Asma bint Yazid

The Orator of the Women

There was a day in Madinah when a woman walked through a circle of men, the closest Companions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and stood before him to speak. She did not lower her request or soften it. She had come, she said, as the ambassador of every woman in the East and the West, carrying a question they all wanted answered and could not ask. The men around her grew uneasy. They had never heard a woman speak to him like this. And when she finished, the Prophet ﷺ turned to those uneasy men and asked them, plainly, whether they had ever heard a woman ask a better question in their lives.

Her name was Asma bint Yazid, and she came from a family and a generation that did not know how to be left out of anything good.

The Asmas

To understand her, it helps to notice something the histories quietly record. Among the women around the Prophet ﷺ, there is a striking pattern in the ones who carried the name Asma. They were tough. Not tough in the ordinary sense of a strong temper, but tough in faith, in courage, in the refusal to be sidelined when the reward of Allah was being handed out.

Think of the most famous of them. Asma bint Abi Bakr (may Allah be pleased with her), the one who tied her waistband in two on

the night of the Hijra and earned the title of the woman of the two belts, who stood firm before Abu Jahl when he came demanding the location of her father and the Prophet ﷺ, and who was struck across the face for refusing to tell him. She stood with that same fearlessness at the age of a hundred, facing down the tyrant al-Hajjaj without a tremor in her voice. There was Asma bint Umayy (may Allah be pleased with her), who argued the merit of those who had made two migrations and who insisted on traveling with the Prophet ﷺ on the Farewell Pilgrimage while she was nine months pregnant, giving birth on the journey itself and continuing on. There was the mother of Abu Jahl, also an Asma, who left her own son, the man the Prophet ﷺ called the Pharaoh of this nation, and came to embrace Islam while he died in his rejection.

These women shared a single, burning quality. None of them could bear the thought of being left behind while reward was being earned. And from Madinah, the most famous bearer of that name and that spirit was Asma bint Yazid ibn al-Sakan.

A daughter of sacrifice

Her father was Yazid ibn al-Sakan, and the people of Madinah did not speak his name lightly. When the lines broke and others fled, Yazid was among those who threw himself between the enemy and the Prophet ﷺ, defending him from every direction. He was martyred on that field, and when they found his body it was so covered in wounds that he could not be recognized. He had given everything, his blood and his life, in the most literal way a man can give them.

The Companions remembered him with a verse of the Qur'an. When they thought of men like Yazid, who had sold themselves

for the sake of Allah, they would recite the words that described exactly what he had done:

But there is also a kind of man who gives his life away to please God, and God is most compassionate to His servants.

QUR'AN 2:207

This was the house Asma came from. She had watched, from inside her own family, what it looked like to hold nothing back from Allah. The courage she would later show was not borrowed. It was inherited, and it was hers.

She also carries a quieter distinction in the record. She was the first woman to be divorced in the time of the Prophet ﷺ, and the verses concerning divorce and its rulings came down in connection with her circumstances. Even in something as ordinary and as painful as the ending of a marriage, her life became a place where guidance was given to the whole community. She did not vanish into that hardship. She remained one of the most present, most learned women of Madinah.

At the door of the Masjid

Asma was a student of the Prophet ﷺ in the fullest sense. He held a gathering, a halaqah, set aside for the women of Madinah and for those who had migrated, a specific time when they could sit and learn and ask. Asma was there, and she carried away from those sessions tens of narrations, a window onto the Prophet ﷺ that we would not otherwise have.

It is through her that we learn how he greeted the women when they came into the Masjid as a group, how he gestured toward them in greeting. It is through her that some of the explanations

of the Qur'an reach us, the meaning he gave to the verses when he sat with the women, including the famous verse about forgiveness. Much of what we know about how the Prophet ﷺ warned against backbiting and against extravagance comes down through Asma bint Yazid. She was not a bystander in that circle. She was one of its carriers, one of the channels through which the Prophet's words flowed out to the generations.

One of her narrations stays with you. The Prophet ﷺ once asked the gathering, "Shall I not tell you who the best of you are?" They said yes. He said: those people who, when you see them, you remember Allah. Then he asked, "Shall I not tell you who the worst of you are?" They said yes. He said: those who go about slandering, who set the people who love one another against each other, and who seek the ruin of the innocent. Asma kept that. The best of people are a reminder of Allah simply by being seen; the worst tear apart what Allah has joined. She lived on the right side of that line and taught it to others.

There is another picture of her, even simpler. She used to prepare food, carry it to the Masjid, and wait outside so that after the prayer she could feed the Prophet ﷺ from what she had cooked. One day she stood there with bread and raisins and invited him in, and he came, and he brought a group of the Ansar with him, around forty men. Asma was among those who witnessed the small dish that fed them all, the food that did not run out though the number was many. And she said afterward that from the day the Prophet ﷺ ate from her plate and drank from her water-skin, the sustenance of her household never stopped increasing. She had given a humble meal for his sake, and the barakah of it followed her for the rest of her life.

The ambassador of the women

Then comes the day for which she is remembered above all, the day that earned her the title Khatibat an-Nisa, the orator and spokesperson of the women. When the women of Madinah had something they needed to put before the Prophet ﷺ, they knew who among them was strong enough to carry it. They sent Asma.

She came while he was sitting with his Companions, and she addressed him with reverence. May my mother and father be sacrificed for you, Messenger of Allah, she said. I have come to you as the representative of the women. There is not a woman who knows of my coming to you, in the East or the West, who does not feel exactly as I feel and hold exactly the concern I am about to raise.

Then she laid it out, and it is worth hearing in full, because there is nothing small in it. Allah has sent you, she said, with the truth to both the men and the women, and we believed in you and in the One who sent you. But we, the women, are kept in our homes. We are the foundations of our households. We satisfy the needs of our husbands. We carry and we bear the children. And meanwhile the men have been given a clear advantage in reward. They go out to the Friday prayer and to the congregations. They visit the sick and walk in funeral processions. They make Hajj after Hajj. And greatest of all, they go out to fight in the path of Allah. When a man among them leaves to do all of that, we are the ones who guard his home and his wealth, who raise his children, who hold everything together in his absence. So, Messenger of Allah, do we share in this reward, or is all of it passing us by?

Look at what she was really asking. She was not complaining about the men. She was afraid of being left out of the reward of Allah. That was the fear of her whole generation, the rich and the

poor, the men and the women alike: that someone else would draw nearer to Allah and they would be left behind. She had carried that fear, and the fear of every woman like her, straight to the Prophet ﷺ.

The Companions around him were taken aback. They were not pleased; the question struck them as too bold, too forceful. But the Prophet ﷺ turned his face to them and said, "Have you ever heard a woman ask a better question about her religion than this one?" They admitted that they had not imagined a woman could be guided to speak this way. Then he turned back to Asma and gave her the answer she had come for. Go back, he told her, and tell the women who sent you: when a woman is good to her husband, and seeks his pleasure in what is right, and follows him in goodness, she has the full share of all of that reward. The one who enables the good is like the one who does it. Their guarding of the home, their raising of the children, their support of the men, all of it was being written for them in full.

Asma turned and walked away, and the narrators describe her leaving with her face shining, declaring the greatness of Allah, pleased with what she had heard. She had asked for the women, and she had brought back, for every one of them, the assurance that not a single act of theirs was being lost.

Nine at Yarmuk

The same woman who served food at the Masjid door and spoke for the women in the circle of the Companions also stood on a battlefield. Years later, at the battle of Yarmuk against the Byzantines, a hard and desperate fight, Asma bint Yazid was there. She carried water to the wounded and tended to the fighters. And when the Byzantine line charged, this woman did

not run. She pulled up a tent-pole, and with it, by her own hand, she struck down nine Byzantine soldiers.

Nine. It is the kind of detail that makes you stop. The orator of the women, the student of the halaqah, the one who feared above all to be left out of reward, was also the one who picked up whatever was in reach and waded into the charge. The fear of missing out on the path of Allah was not talk for her. When the moment came, she was in it.

This was the spirit of the name she carried, the spirit of the Ansar, the spirit of her martyred father. The same root produced the gentle service at the Masjid, the bold speech before the Prophet ﷺ, and the tent-pole at Yarmuk. It was all one thing: a soul that could not stand to watch the reward of Allah pass it by.

What Asma's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel only that here was a remarkable, fearless woman. That is true, and it is not enough. Her life is not on display to be admired. It is a question put directly to our own faith.

Start with what drove her, because everything else grew from it. Asma was afraid of one thing above all: of being left out of the reward of Allah. Not of poverty, not of danger, not of the opinions of the men in the circle. She feared that someone, somewhere, was drawing nearer to her Lord while she stood still. Ask yourself honestly what you are most afraid of missing. A career, a comfort, the approval of people, an opportunity in this world. Hers was a holy fear, and it is the fear that makes a believer run. If we feared falling behind in the eyes of Allah the way we fear falling behind in the eyes of people, our whole lives would reorganize themselves around what He loves.

Then look at how she carried that fear. She did not let it curdle into envy or complaint. She took it to Allah and His Messenger ﷺ and asked. She wanted to know how she, in her actual life of a home and a husband and children, could earn the same nearness as those who seemed to have more avenues to it. And the answer she received is one of the great mercies for ordinary people: the one who enables the good has the reward of the good. The quiet work that no one applauds, the raising of a child for the sake of Allah, the support that lets someone else do something visible, the meal carried to the door, all of it is counted in full. Your ordinary day, offered to Allah, is not a lesser path. It is the path. Asma proves that a woman tending a household and a woman striking down nine soldiers were drinking from the same fountain of reward, because both were doing it for Him.

See, too, what she did with the small things. She cooked and waited at a door, and the barakah of that single sincere act followed her for life. We tend to despise our small deeds, to assume that only the grand ones count. Asma teaches the opposite. Give Allah the little you have, the meal, the kind word, the hour of teaching, the cup of water on a hard day, and let Him decide what it becomes. What you offer to Him with sincerity, He multiplies in ways you will never trace.

And learn from where her courage came. It was inherited from a father who gave his life away to please God, and the Qur'an honored him for it. Faith runs in families when families let it run. The contentment, the boldness, the refusal to be left behind: these are taught, mostly without words, by people who live them in front of children who are watching. You are building, right now, the inheritance your household will carry. Asma's father gave his blood; the least we can give is a home where the love of Allah is the most ordinary thing in it.

So take one thing from her into your week. Let yourself feel, even once, the fear of missing out on nearness to Allah, and act on it: pray one prayer as though it were your share of a reward you cannot bear to lose. Offer one small deed, quietly, for His sake alone, the way she offered her bread and raisins, and leave the rest to Him. And when you are tempted to think your ordinary life is too small to matter to your Lord, remember the woman who guarded a home and was promised the full reward, and was praised by the Prophet ﷺ himself for refusing to be overlooked. May Allah be pleased with Asma bint Yazid and with all the Asmas of that generation, and may He make us, in our ordinary days, among those who fear nothing so much as falling behind in His path.

This chapter follows the account of Asma bint Yazid (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2:207). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Umm Waraqa bint Abdullah

The Martyred Hafidha

There is a question that comes up quietly, again and again, whenever we speak of the people who carried the Qur'an in the first generation. We name the great reciters who sat around the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the luminaries whose memories held the revelation whole, and almost all of them are men. And so someone asks, gently and seriously: were there any women among them? Were there women who gathered the Qur'an the way those men did, who memorized it and mastered it and were trusted with it? The answer is yes. And the first name on that short list is a woman from Madinah named Umm Waraqa bint Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with her).

To understand why her name is rare, you have to understand the world she lived in.

A literate woman in an unlettered age

Literacy was not common among the Arabs. Reading and writing were skills held by a few, not the many, and in a society where most people could not read at all, the number of women who could was smaller still. The handful of men who could write ended up as scribes for the Prophet ﷺ, recording the revelation as it came. Among the women, that circle narrowed almost to nothing.

Umm Waraqa was one of those few. She was a literate woman in an age of unlettered people, and that single fact set her apart before she had done anything else. But literacy alone does not explain her. She was also noble, from one of the respected houses of Madinah, and she was wealthy, having inherited a great fortune. She did not have to spend her days worrying about her livelihood. And she was not entangled in the politics of Madinah before Islam, none of the feuds, none of the wars between the tribes that had bled the city for years. She stood apart from all of it.

When you put those things together, you see what Allah had quietly prepared in her. A woman who could read. A woman with no financial anxiety. A woman with no political quarrels weighing on her. When the message of Islam reached Madinah, she was free, more free than almost anyone around her, to give herself entirely to one thing. And the thing she chose was the Qur'an.

The one who gathered the Qur'an

She embraced the call before the Prophet ﷺ even arrived in Madinah, in those early days when the message was carried to the city ahead of him. And when he did come, she became one of the women who dedicated themselves to the Book of Allah with rare seriousness, alongside the mothers of the believers and the other women of knowledge in that first community.

She did not merely memorize a portion. She gathered the Qur'an. She held it, recited it, and grew proficient in it until she stood among the most skilled reciters of her time. This is what earned her the title that history keeps for her: the hafidha of the women, the female keeper of the Qur'an in Madinah. Students came to her. Women of the city sat before her and recited so that she could correct them, the way a master corrects a learner, letter by

letter, until the recitation is sound. In a community where the Qur'an was still being revealed and learned and protected from error, she was one of the people entrusted with that protection.

There is a narration that the Prophet ﷺ instructed her to lead the people of her household in prayer. Some in our own time have tried to stretch that single report into something it was never meant to carry, claiming it shows the Prophet ﷺ permitted a woman to lead a mixed congregation of men and women. But the report is far too ambiguous to bear that weight. Her household was a wealthy one, full of children and servants. The "folk of her home" she was told to lead could easily have been those, and the circumstances may have been particular to her situation. What is not ambiguous, what the histories agree on plainly, is the thing that matters most: she was a distinguished reciter of the Qur'an, and she taught the women of Madinah, and she recited among the best of the reciters. That is her station, and it is a high one.

"Let me go out with you"

The lives we are about to walk through are not all gentle. Many of them carry sharp turns and real difficulty, and hers is one of them. But before the difficulty, there is a moment that shows you exactly what kind of soul she was.

When the Battle of Badr drew near, Umm Waraqa came to the Prophet ﷺ with a request. She asked him to let her go out with the army. "O Messenger of Allah," she said, "let me go out and fight alongside you." And then she added something specific, something that tells you she had thought about it: even if all she did was tend to the wounded, she wanted to be there, in the battle, with him. She wanted to be near the Prophet ﷺ in his hardest hour.

This was the spirit of the Ansar, the people of Madinah who had opened their city and their homes to the Prophet ﷺ and his companions. They wanted to be with him not only in ease but in danger, to stand where the cost was highest. There was a man among the companions who came to the Prophet ﷺ as the army set out, and when the Prophet ﷺ asked him what he was seeking, the man pointed to his own throat and said he wanted to be struck with an arrow right there, and to die. The Prophet ﷺ told him to be truthful with Allah, and Allah would be truthful with him. That was the air these people breathed.

So Umm Waraqa did not hide her hope. She said it openly. She told the Prophet ﷺ that she wanted Allah to grant her shahada, martyrdom. She wanted to go out and to die in His path.

The Prophet ﷺ answered her with something she could not have expected. He told her to stay in her home, and to trust that Allah would grant her the martyrdom she longed for. He told her, in effect, that she would indeed be a martyr, but not on the field of Badr. She would be a shahidah in another way, in a time and place of Allah's choosing.

The martyr who walked among them

Think about what that did to her life. From that day, she carried a name. Among the Prophet ﷺ and his companions, she was known as the shahidah, the martyr, before a single drop of her blood had been spilled. People who loved her would say, "Let us go and visit the martyr," and they meant her, alive, in her home in Madinah. The Prophet ﷺ himself used to visit her, and he too spoke of her this way. Imagine walking among people who all know, on the word of the Prophet ﷺ, that you are going to be a martyr, and who already honor you with the title while you are still

teaching and reciting and breathing. She carried that promise quietly for the rest of her years.

And those years were full. She kept her place as the teacher of the Qur'an for the women of Madinah, the foremost authority among them, reciting and correcting and passing the Book on to the next hearts that would hold it. But she became known for more than her teaching. She became known for her worship: for her fasting, and for her prayer at night. People who passed her home in the dark could hear her, standing in the long hours, reciting the Qur'an to her Lord. Her recitation was not only a service she gave to others. It was the sound of her own private nearness to Allah, drifting out of her house into the streets of the sleeping city.

Hold on to that detail, because it matters for the end of her story. Her recitation was so constant, so woven into the nights of Madinah, that her neighbors learned the rhythm of it. Her voice in prayer was a fixed thing, as reliable as the dawn.

The night her voice fell silent

She grew old. The histories tell us she was already advanced in years when Islam came, which means that by the time of the caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) she was an elderly woman, perhaps in her sixties or seventies, still in her home, still reciting.

Umar used to make his patrols through Madinah at night, walking the streets, watching over the people in his care. One morning he remarked on something that had unsettled him. "I did not hear my aunt last night," he said, using a title of honor and affection for her. That is how dependable her worship had become. The leader of the believers could walk past her house in the night and

expect to hear the Qur'an, and when he did not hear it, he noticed, and it troubled him enough to speak of it in the morning.

When her home was checked, the terrible thing was discovered. Umm Waraqa, this keeper of the Qur'an, this teacher of the women, this woman the Prophet ﷺ had named a martyr, had been killed in her own house. Because she was wealthy, a male and a female servant in her household had plotted against her. In the night they had murdered her and seized her wealth, and then fled. The voice that Madinah had grown used to hearing in the darkness had been silenced by greed.

And so the promise was kept. Years earlier, on the eve of Badr, the Prophet ﷺ had told her she would not die on the battlefield, but that Allah would still grant her the martyrdom she had asked for. Now it had come, in her own home, in the middle of her devotion. When the news settled, the companions understood what they had been saying all along. The Prophet ﷺ had spoken the truth when he called her the martyr and went to visit the martyr. She had been a shahidah in waiting for all those years, and now she was a shahidah in full.

Umar did not let the matter rest. He personally pursued the two who had killed her, and they were found, and they were executed for their crime. So her death was not only mourned; it was answered. And the name she had carried so long became, at last, completely her own: the martyred hafidha, the shahidah among the companions, the woman who gathered the Qur'an and gave her life still holding it.

What Umm Waraqa's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read a life like this and feel only a distant respect, to file her under the great and the unreachable and

move on. That would be a quiet loss. Her life is not a relic to admire from behind glass. It is a set of questions pressed directly against our own iman.

Begin with how she used what she was given. Allah had handed her advantages that most people spend their lives chasing: literacy, wealth, security, freedom from conflict. She could have spent all of it on herself, on comfort, on standing, on an easy and forgotten life. Instead she took every advantage and poured it into the Qur'an. Look honestly at what Allah has given you, your time, your money, your skills, the seasons when life is not pulling you in ten directions, and ask what you are spending it on. She turned her ease into a means of carrying the Book of Allah. Most of us turn our ease into more ease. Her life asks whether the gifts in your hands are being offered back to the One who gave them, or merely consumed.

Then there is the secret of her nights. The most moving image in her story is not the battlefield she was kept from; it is her voice in the dark, reciting to Allah when she thought only Allah was listening. She did not perform her worship for an audience. She stood in prayer night after night, year after year, for the sake of her Lord, and it was so sincere and so steady that it became the very thing that revealed her death. That is ikhlas, worship done for Allah alone in the hours when no one is watching. Ask yourself what your private worship sounds like, the prayer no one sees, the recitation no one hears, the dua whispered with the lights off. That hidden life is the truest measure of faith, and hers was so full that the city could hear the overflow of it through her walls.

Consider, too, how she trusted the promise of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ. She asked for martyrdom and was told no, not the

way she imagined, but yes in a way she could not yet see. Then she went home and lived an ordinary, faithful life for decades, carrying a promise she had no power to fulfill herself, and never once chasing it or doubting it. She simply trusted, and taught, and prayed, and left the rest to Allah. He kept His word in His own time and His own way. There is something here for every one of us who has prayed for a thing and not received it in the shape we wanted. Allah's promise does not fail; it ripens. Her life asks whether you can hold a hope you have entrusted to Allah without grasping at it, content that He knows the time and the manner better than you do.

And here is the part that should steady your heart. Her death looked, on its surface, like a horror: a righteous old woman murdered for money in her own home, her worship cut short by the very people she sheltered. The world would call that a tragedy and nothing more. But Allah had already written it as the fulfillment of her dearest wish. What looked like a crime was the doorway to the martyrdom she had begged for years before. This is how Allah works with those who love Him. What seems from the outside like loss and cruelty can be, in His record, the answer to a prayer and the crown on a life. Nothing she gave to Allah, not her wealth, not her nights, not her longing, was wasted. He gathered all of it.

So take something from her into your own week. Give one hour of your night to Allah that no one will ever know about. Use one gift you have, your reading, your money, your free time, in His service instead of your own. Hold one unanswered prayer with trust instead of bitterness, believing He has not forgotten it. That is the way she lived: in the quiet, in sincerity, in steady trust, with the Qur'an on her tongue. It is a way still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Umm Waraqa bint Abdullah,

the martyred hafidha, and may He grant us a measure of her devotion, accept our hidden worship as He accepted hers, and gather us in the company of those who carried His Book.

This chapter follows the account of Umm Waraqa bint Abdullah (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Ubayy ibn Ka'b

The Master of the Reciters

There is a particular kind of greatness that leaves almost no footprint outside one room. If you had walked into the Prophet's mosque in Madinah a few years after the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had passed, and you looked for the man whose name the scholars would one day place above every other reciter of the Qur'an, you would not have found him in the markets, or in the halls of governors, or out among the powerful. You would have found him exactly where he always was: standing in that mosque, leading the prayer, or pacing slowly back and forth reciting to himself, or sitting after the prayer answering the questions people brought him about the Book of Allah. Almost every narration we have of him is set in that one place. He lived inside the Qur'an, and the Qur'an became the whole shape of his life.

His name was Ubayy ibn Ka'b (may Allah be pleased with him), and the Prophet ﷺ called him Sayyid al-Qurra, the master of the reciters.

A man of the Ansar, marked early

Ubayy was from the Ansar of Madinah, from the tribe of Khazraj and its sub-clan of Banu al-Najjar, which is to say he was from the very people who were the maternal relatives of the Prophet ﷺ. He was one of the small number of Arabs who could already read and write before Islam, a rare thing in a society that carried

its poetry and its lineages in memory rather than on paper. In this he resembled the other two great collectors of the Qur'an among the Ansar, Zayd ibn Thabit and Mu'adh ibn Jabal. But unlike them, Ubayy was not a young man when the message reached him. He was, as far as we can tell, close to the age of the Prophet ﷺ himself.

He came into Islam early and decisively. He travelled to Makkah and took the pledge with the Prophet ﷺ at al-'Aqabah, choosing the new faith and binding himself to the Messenger before the Hijrah had even happened. He was a Badri, one of those who fought at Badr, those of whom the Prophet ﷺ said that Allah looked upon the people of Badr and forgave them. And when the Prophet ﷺ reached Madinah, it was Ubayy who became the first of the Ansar to serve as his scribe, writing down the revelation as it came.

By the end of his life the histories describe him in vivid, almost luminous terms: a man whose hair and beard had gone completely white, without a single black strand left, his skin bright, his eyes deeply black, his garments and turban white. Everything about him seems to have been sharp and clear and unmistakable, as though the man who carried the Book so carefully had himself become easy to see.

Take the Qur'an from four

The Prophet ﷺ once told his Companions to take the Qur'an from four people, and Ubayy was among the four named. This was not a casual recommendation. It was the Messenger of Allah ﷺ pointing his community toward the most reliable wells from which to draw the recitation, and Ubayy's name was on that short list while the Prophet ﷺ still walked the earth.

But the distinction goes further than that, and it is worth pausing on, because it shaped the entire history of how the Qur'an reached us. Among the reciters, the Prophet ﷺ singled out three by their particular gifts: the most knowledgeable in inheritance and the precise calculations of the law was Zayd, the deepest in understanding and jurisprudence was Mu'adh, and the best in the recitation of the Qur'an was Ubayy. In another narration the Prophet ﷺ said plainly that the best of his nation in reciting the Qur'an was Ubayy. He was the oldest of the three and, in this one art, the greatest.

This is not only a matter of honour. Ask almost any person today who has memorised the Qur'an and learned it formally from a teacher, who in turn learned from a teacher, back and back through the generations, and you will find that the chains of nine of the ten canonical recitations pass through Ubayy ibn Ka'b on their way to the Prophet ﷺ. When a student finishes reading the whole Qur'an to a qualified scholar and receives the license to teach it, that license travels, teacher by teacher, until it reaches Ubayy, and from Ubayy to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. The physical book we hold owes much to the labour of Zayd, who gathered it. But the living sound of the recitation, passed mouth to ear across fourteen centuries, runs almost entirely through this one man. Ubayy himself once described the closeness he had to it: he received the recitation, he said, from the one who received it from Jibril, while it was still fresh.

The verse, and the hand on the chest

There is a tenderness in how the Prophet ﷺ dealt with Ubayy that the narrations preserve carefully. One day the Prophet ﷺ came to him and asked, "O Ubayy, which verse of what you have memorised is the greatest?" Ubayy answered at once, reciting

Ayat al-Kursi, the verse of the Throne. The Prophet ﷺ struck him gently on the chest and said words that meant, roughly, that knowledge would now come easily to him, that it would be made smooth for him. To have the hand of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ placed on your chest with such a prayer is the kind of thing a man carries for the rest of his life, something he could feel years after the Prophet ﷺ was gone.

But the moment Ubayy treasured above all others came differently. The Prophet ﷺ said to him, "Allah has commanded me to recite the Qur'an to you." Ubayy, stunned, asked, "Allah named me to you?" The Prophet ﷺ said yes. And Ubayy, this serious, austere man, broke into tears. Imagine it from where he stood. He had embraced Islam at the hands of the Prophet ﷺ; he had learned everything he knew from him; and now he was being told that Allah, above the seven heavens, in the presence of the closest angels, had spoken his name and instructed His Messenger to recite to him. He wanted to be sure. "You mean me, by my name?" And the Prophet ﷺ recited to him.

His son narrated this, and noted that when his father told the story, the joy on him was visible, which was unusual, because Ubayy was not a man easily moved to delight. His son asked him about it, and Ubayy answered with a verse. Allah Himself had given the measure of when joy is permitted:

Say [Prophet], 'In God's grace and mercy let them rejoice: these are better than all they accumulate.'

QUR'AN 10:58

There was no moment in his life more precious to him than that one. Allah had named him, and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ had recited the word of Allah to him with his own voice. Of all the

things a person could accumulate, Ubayy understood that this was the treasure.

The fever he asked for

One narration shows, almost startlingly, how far his heart reached toward Allah, and it comes with a warning attached. As a rule, we are not taught to ask Allah for hardship. When the Prophet ﷺ once heard a man asking for patience, he told him to ask Allah for well-being instead, to ask to be spared and pardoned, because no one should invite trial upon himself. And yet there were a few of the Companions whose state with Allah was so particular that they reached for things the rest of us are told to leave alone.

Ubayy fell ill with a fever, and he asked about its reward, because the Prophet ﷺ had taught that no believer is touched by sickness, not even the prick of a thorn or a wave of anxiety, except that Allah wipes away some of their sins and raises their rank. So Ubayy made a strange and daring du'a. He asked Allah for a fever that would stay with him, but that would not keep him from going out to the prayer, nor from Hajj, nor from striving in the path of Allah. He wanted the closeness that comes through being tested, but he would not let it cost him a single act of worship. And the narrations report that this is precisely what happened to him: a fever that persisted with him, yet that lifted whenever the time came for prayer, or pilgrimage, or battle, and returned when he came back. It is recorded among the unusual gifts given to certain Companions. We are not meant to imitate the du'a. But we are meant to see the man behind it, and to understand where his heart was pointed.

What he refused to belittle

By the time of the caliphate of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), Ubayy's standing was settled and known. 'Umar would say openly that whoever had a question about the Qur'an should go to Ubayy, just as he sent questions of inheritance to Zayd and matters of public policy to himself. When the Companions prayed the night prayer of Ramadan behind several different leaders in the mosque, it was 'Umar who decided, in his wisdom, to gather them all behind one imam, and of all the Companions he chose Ubayy to lead them. He was their agreed-upon imam.

And yet there is something quietly profound in what 'Umar did not do. He appointed Zayd, he appointed Mu'adh, he appointed many men to govern and to judge. He never appointed Ubayy to any such post. Ubayy noticed, and he asked about it, not out of ambition but out of curiosity. 'Umar's answer was striking. He told Ubayy, in effect, that he feared such a position would stain his religion, that Ubayy was too pure for it, and that he did not want to place him in charge of the worldly affairs of the Muslims. This was not a verdict against leadership; 'Umar trusted many righteous men with it. It was a reading of one particular soul. Ubayy had a severe, ascetic disposition. He was unsettled by the wealth and ease he saw flowing into the community as Islam expanded; it frightened him, and at times it made him hard on people, wishing they would turn back to the Qur'an. 'Umar understood that this man belonged in the mosque, with the Book, and not in the marketplace of power.

There is a scene that captures the tension in Ubayy's heart. He was looking out over a market where people were competing fiercely over the goods of this world, racing one another for it, and he turned and said that he had heard the Prophet ﷺ describe a day when the Euphrates would draw back and

uncover a mountain of gold beneath it. People would rush to it, each one snatching as much as he could and trying to leave nothing for those behind him, and out of every hundred who fought over that treasure, ninety-nine would perish. It was, to Ubayy, the very opposite of the spirit of Islam, and watching the markets, he could see the seed of it already. He used to weep when he recited the warning that Allah could send His punishment upon a people:

Say, 'He has power to send punishment on you from above or from under your very feet, or to divide you into discordant factions and make some taste the violence of others.'

QUR'AN 6:65

He sought refuge in Allah from seeing the believers divided, from watching them turn on one another over the things of this world and corrupt their bond with their Lord in the process.

And yet, for all his severity, Ubayy was not a man who hated the world itself, and one beautiful narration makes this clear. A skilled speaker from Iraq came to sit in 'Umar's gathering and began to disparage the dunya, running it down with such eloquence that he reduced it to nothing, certain he was saying something pious. A white-haired man sitting beside 'Umar answered him. What you said is good, he told the visitor, but you went too far. Do you not know what is in this world? In this world are our provisions that carry us to the Hereafter, and in it are the good deeds for which we are rewarded. The world, in Ubayy's understanding, was not a thing to be cursed. It was an opportunity, a field in which to please Allah. The man from Iraq asked who the speaker was, and was told: that is the master of the Muslims. Even a man who

feared materialism would not let people throw away the gift of a life that could be spent in obedience.

His advice, and the streets of Madinah

Ubayy completed the entire Qur'an once every eight nights, a measured pace, taking his time, dwelling in it rather than rushing through. He was, as one description puts it, always engaged in worship, and when people needed him he would set his own devotions aside, sit with them, answer their questions, and then return to his recitation. 'Umar himself said that the bulk of the knowledge of the community came from three men: from 'Umar, from 'Ali, and from Ubayy. When Ibn 'Abbas was asked about the famous story of Musa and the righteous servant of Allah, the long account preserved in Surah al-Kahf, he saw Ubayy passing by, called him over, and had him narrate the whole of it, because Ubayy carried it directly. That is how the tradition was kept alive: not in books on a shelf, but in living men who had received it from the Prophet ﷺ.

When a man came to him asking for advice, Ubayy gave him the counsel that was the distilled essence of his entire life. Take the Book of Allah as your imam, he said, your leader; be content with it as your judge and your ruler. This is what Allah has left for you through His Messenger ﷺ, an intercessor whose word will be accepted, a witness over you against which no charge of falsehood can ever be raised. It contains the mention of you and of all who came before you, and the judgement of everything between, and the affairs of all who will come after. Take it as your imam. Then he recited the verse that the Prophet ﷺ will speak as a complaint on the Day of Judgement:

The Messenger has said, 'Lord, my people treat this Quran as something to be shunned,'

QUR'AN 25:30

He did not want to be among those who abandoned the Book. He had given his life to it.

Allah spared Ubayy the great trials he had feared so deeply. He died before the fitna broke out among the Muslims, before the community turned on itself. And when he died, a man arrived in Madinah and found the streets flooded with people moving in one direction, more than he had ever seen, and he asked what was happening, whether the people were setting out for some great journey. They turned to him and said, you must not be from this city, or you would know. Today, they told him, the master of the Muslims has passed away. He was buried in al-Baqi', in the resting place of the Companions beside the mosque of the Prophet ﷺ. The imam of that mosque was gone, and the whole city came out to walk behind him.

What Ubayy's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read the life of a man like Ubayy and feel that it belongs to another order of being, a reciter so great that the chains of the entire ummah run through him, a man named by Allah from above the heavens. We could admire him from a safe distance and learn nothing. That would be a waste of his life. His story is not a trophy. It is a question put directly to our own iman.

The heart of Ubayy was anchored in one thing, and it is the first thing his life asks of us: a real, daily relationship with the Book of Allah. Not the Qur'an as an object we own and leave on the shelf, but the Qur'an as the imam of our days, the thing we return to, recite, and let judge us. Ubayy stood in the same spot in the

mosque for years, reciting and teaching, and he was content that this was his whole portion of greatness, because he understood what he was holding. Most of us treat the Qur'an as something to be gotten through, a few rushed pages, a recitation half-heard. Ubayy treated it as the voice of his Lord, fresh from Jibril. The single most concrete thing you can take from him into an ordinary week is this: open the Book today, read even a little of it slowly enough to feel it, and let it correct you. That is not a scholar's task. It is open to anyone who will sit with it.

His sincerity is the second thing. Here was a man whom the caliph deliberately kept out of power, and he did not resent it; he simply asked why, and accepted the answer. He had no governorship, no title of command, no worldly station, and he wanted none. His reward was entirely with Allah, in a place no one could see and no one could take. When Allah named him, his joy was complete, because that was the only audience he was living for. Ask yourself honestly how much of what you do is shaped by who is watching, by the hope of being noticed or thanked or promoted. Ubayy shows you another way to live: to want the pleasure of Allah so completely that the recognition of people becomes almost beside the point. That is *ikhlas*, and it is the thing that turns ordinary deeds into treasure.

The third thing is his fear of Allah and his sober view of this world. He wept at the thought of the believers being divided and tested. He warned against the race for gold that consumes a person and leaves him with nothing in the Hereafter. And yet he refused to despise the world itself, because he saw it for what it is: provisions for the journey home, and a field of good deeds. That balance is rare and it is needed now more than ever. The world is not your enemy, and it is not your home. It is your opportunity. Every honest dirham, every kind word, every prayer,

every act of patience is a seed you are planting in it for the Hereafter. Ubayy's life asks you to stop racing the crowd toward what perishes, and to start quietly gathering what lasts.

So take one thing from this master of the reciters into your own life. Open the Qur'an and let it speak to you the way he did, even for a few minutes a day. Do one act for Allah alone that no one will ever know about. And when the world rushes past you toward its gold, hold still, and remember that what you give to Allah is the only thing you truly keep. May Allah be pleased with Ubayy ibn Ka'b, make us people of the Qur'an, raise us with it, and gather us in the company of those who loved His Book and lived by it.

This chapter follows the account of Ubayy ibn Ka'b (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (10:58, 6:65, 25:30). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Muadh ibn Jabal

The Most Knowledgeable and the Beloved

There is a scene the early Muslims loved to retell, set years after the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had died, in a mosque in Damascus. A man named Abu Idris al-Khawlani, who would become one of the great scholars of the generation after the Companions, walked in and found a gathering of people clustered around a single young man. He was strikingly beautiful, with a bright smile and pearly teeth, and whenever anyone in the circle disagreed about a question of faith, they all turned to him, and his word settled the matter. Abu Idris watched him, watched his manners with the people, and finally asked who he was. They told him: this is Muadh ibn Jabal.

The next day Abu Idris came early, waited until Muadh finished his prayer, then came around in front of him, greeted him, and said something he had never said to a stranger before. "By Allah, I love you for the sake of Allah." Muadh looked at him. "For the sake of Allah?" he asked. Abu Idris said yes, only for His sake. Muadh asked again. And again. And only when he was certain did he pull the man close and give him glad tidings, narrating what he had heard from the Prophet ﷺ, that Allah had said His love is made binding for those who love one another for His sake, who sit together and visit one another and give to one another for His sake.

That is how the histories want us to meet Muadh ibn Jabal (may Allah be pleased with him): a man whose presence stopped people in their tracks, and whose first instinct, even with a stranger, was to turn the moment toward Allah.

The boy who debated the scholars

He was a child when the revelation began, not an adult, a young boy in Madinah noted first of all for his appearance. They said he was tall and handsome, with a wheatish complexion, curly hair, large eyes, and broad shoulders. When he was silent, people stared at him; when he spoke, they listened in awe. The comparison the scholars reach for is Mus'ab ibn Umayr, the radiant young man of Makkah. If Makkah had its Mus'ab, Madinah had its Muadh.

His father, Jabal, had died before Islam. His mother embraced the faith, and some histories place her among the few women who attended the pledge at Aqabah. Muadh himself, still very young, was among the seventy who went out from Madinah and gave their oath to the Prophet ﷺ that night, having accepted Islam through Mus'ab before the Prophet ﷺ ever arrived in the city.

He was no passive convert. He was a caller from the start, explaining the faith to the youth of Madinah, the teenagers his own age. And he was sharp enough, even as a boy, to argue with the learned men among the People of the Book who had settled in Madinah. He would say to them: we grew up hearing from you that a prophet was coming, described in your own scriptures, and now that he has come, you are the ones rejecting him. It was in the course of those very arguments that a verse came down, in his defense and against those who hid what they knew:

As for those who hide the proofs and guidance We send down, after We have made them clear to people in the Scripture, God rejects them, and so do others,

QUR'AN 2:159

Imagine that. A teenager, holding his ground against trained scholars, and the Lord of the worlds sends down an answer to the argument he was making.

A house of the Qur'an

When the Prophet ﷺ reached Madinah, he saw what was in this young man and would not let his age hide it. He kept Muadh near him and poured knowledge into him. And when he paired the emigrants of Makkah with the helpers of Madinah as brothers, he gave Muadh, a teenage host with almost nothing material to offer, one of the most remarkable of all the emigrants: Abdullah ibn Mas'ud.

Think about that household. Ibn Mas'ud loved the Qur'an more than almost anyone, was the first to recite it aloud in Makkah, and took more chapters fresh from the mouth of the Prophet ﷺ than any other person. Two single men, sharing a home, each of them, by separate accounts, praying deep into the night. It is not hard to picture them waking one another, fasting together, standing in the dark with the Qur'an. The Prophet ﷺ later named four men from whom the Qur'an should be learned, and Muadh was one.

Muadh just made the cut for Badr, fighting at fifteen, and he was present at the battles that followed. But what set him apart was knowledge. He became one of the scribes of revelation, trusted to write down the Qur'an. And in a city full of senior Companions, men like Abu Bakr and Umar, the Prophet ﷺ said plainly: the most knowledgeable of my nation about the lawful and the

forbidden is Muadh ibn Jabal. A teenager, declared the foremost authority in the entire community on what is halal and what is haram, and among the very few permitted to give religious verdicts while the Prophet ﷺ was still alive. Umar himself would tell the people: whoever has a question of jurisprudence, let him go to Muadh ibn Jabal.

The one he loved

So many of Muadh's reports reach us from the saddle, riding behind the Prophet ﷺ on a donkey, or beside him, with the Prophet's hand resting on his chest or his knee. This was how the Prophet ﷺ taught the young: turning his full attention to them, giving them his time.

One of the most famous of these is in Sahih Muslim. Riding behind the Prophet ﷺ, Muadh heard him call his name, then fall silent, then call again, a third time, the anticipation building. At last he asked, "Do you know what Allah's right is upon His servants?" Muadh, careful and well-mannered, said, "Allah and His Messenger know best." The Prophet ﷺ said: His right is that they worship Him and associate nothing with Him. Then, "Do you know the servants' right upon Allah, if they do that?" Again Muadh deferred. The answer: that He will not punish them. Muadh asked, should I tell the people this good news? The Prophet ﷺ said no, for then they would rely on it and grow lazy. Muadh held that conversation unspoken until he lay dying, telling it only then because he feared the sin of concealing what he had heard. On another such ride, asked for advice, he was given three lines a person could live by: be mindful of Allah wherever you are; follow a bad deed with a good one and it will wipe it out; and treat people with good character.

And then there is the moment that, more than any other, reveals what was between them. As the Prophet ﷺ prepared to send Muadh away, he took him by the hand and said, "O Muadh, I love you." Muadh answered, "And I love you, O Messenger of Allah." Then the Prophet ﷺ said, "Because I love you, do not fail to say at the end of every prayer: O Allah, help me to remember You, to thank You, and to worship You well." Few people in all of history can say that the Prophet ﷺ looked them in the eye and told them he loved them. Muadh was one. And this was the same Prophet ﷺ who, when someone said "I love this person for the sake of Allah," would answer, "Have you told him?" He practiced his own teaching. He told Muadh.

Learning, and the growing pains of it

Muadh's brilliance did not arrive complete. He grew into it, and the histories preserve his mistakes with the same honesty as his virtues. He used to pray the night prayer behind the Prophet ﷺ and then return to lead his own tribe, and his recitation ran long, the longest chapters of the Qur'an, deep into the night. One night an older man, tired and unable to keep up, finished alone and left, and Muadh called him a hypocrite. The man complained to the Prophet ﷺ, who turned to Muadh and said, "Are you a cause of trial, Muadh?" Lead them with the shorter chapters, he was told, for among them are the elderly and the weak; save the long recitation for your own night prayer. It was a correction, and Muadh took it.

Another time the Prophet ﷺ was speaking of the things that drag people into the Fire, and he mentioned the tongue. Muadh asked, "Are we really held to account for what we say?" The Prophet ﷺ answered with an expression of the Arabs, "May your mother lose you, Muadh," not a curse but a jolt of emphasis, and then

said: does anything throw people on their faces into the Fire more than the harvests of their tongues?

And here is the beauty of how Muadh held what he learned. He narrated that hadith, and he was also the one who, when a man slandered the Companion Ka'b ibn Malik before the Prophet ﷺ, objected: "What a terrible thing to say. We know nothing of Ka'b but good." Ka'b never forgot it. The man who reported the danger of the tongue was the same man who showed, in public, the best use of it.

His night prayer matched his love of the Qur'an. One of his recorded supplications, said when he rose in the dark, runs: O Allah, the stars have come out and the eyes have closed, and You are the Living, the Sustaining. My flight from the Fire is too slow, and my pursuit of the Garden is too weak. And I have nothing to present to You except that I bear witness there is no god but You alone, and that Muhammad is Your servant and messenger. This was a man the Prophet ﷺ called the most knowledgeable of the nation in the sacred law, accusing himself before Allah of not running fast enough. He once confided to Abu Musa al-Ash'ari that he sought reward for his sleep just as he sought it for his prayer, since he slept only to gather strength to rise and worship. Even his rest he turned toward Allah.

Sent out alone

The greatest testimony to his standing came in how the Prophet ﷺ used him. When Makkah opened and its people entered Islam in their thousands, the Prophet ﷺ left Muadh behind, a young man of Madinah, to teach the Makkans their religion while he himself returned home. The wisdom in it was deliberate. He had sent a Makkan, Mus'ab, to teach Madinah; now he left a Madinan to teach Makkah, breaking the old assumption that you can only

learn from your own tribe. Authority comes from knowledge, not from blood.

Then came Yemen. The Prophet ﷺ dispatched Muadh to teach an entire foreign people their faith, and the histories preserve a long farewell that reads like a blueprint for building a society. First he helped settle Muadh's debts, for Muadh was so generous that wealth never stayed in his hands. Then, riding toward the edge of the city, he gave him his instructions. How will you judge, he asked, when a matter comes to you? Muadh said: by the Book of Allah. And if you do not find it there? By the Sunnah of the Messenger. And if not there either? Then I will reason with my own best effort and spare nothing to get it right. The Prophet ﷺ struck his chest and praised Allah for guiding the messenger's messenger to what pleases the Messenger of Allah.

He told him the order of priorities: call them first to bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His messenger, and everything else comes after that; then the five daily prayers; then a charity taken from their rich and given to their poor, never touching the most precious of people's wealth. And he gave him a warning that has echoed down the centuries: beware the supplication of the one who has been wronged, for there is no barrier between it and Allah. Do not oppress people, even those who do not believe, so that they call on Allah against you.

The farewell, and the long road home

The farewell was not yet over, and what came next broke Muadh's heart. As the Prophet ﷺ walked beside his mount and reached the gates of Madinah, he said, "Muadh, perhaps you will not meet me again after this year. Perhaps you will pass by my mosque and my grave." Muadh had not seen it coming. The

Prophet ﷺ was not ill; the Companions could not even imagine the day he would die. And here he was, telling this young man: you may come back and not find me, only my grave. Muadh wept, and could not stop. The Prophet ﷺ told him not to cry, and turned back toward the city, and said, "The people closest to me are the people of God-consciousness, whoever they are and wherever they are." The bond, he was teaching, transcends time and place. His last words to Muadh as he sent him off were: show people only the best of your character.

They say that when Muadh reached Yemen, the marks of his weeping were still on him; he had likely cried the whole way. And Yemen fell in love with him. He led them with goodness, called them, and the people entered Islam. The Prophet ﷺ passed away while Muadh was there, just as he had foretold.

We hear of him next in Sham, in greater Syria, where Umar placed him as the chief scholar the people turned to, just as they had once turned to him in the city of the Prophet ﷺ. Umar's regard ran so deep that, naming who he would appoint as caliph after him, he said that if Abu Ubaydah had died he would choose Muadh, because he had heard the Messenger ﷺ say that Muadh will be raised on the Day of Judgment ahead of all the scholars, a degree of separation between him and them. Once, when Muadh corrected Umar publicly on a ruling, Umar did not bristle. He said: women no longer give birth to the likes of Muadh; were it not for Muadh, Umar would have been ruined.

The plague, and the last words

When the plague of Amwas swept through Sham, it took some of the greatest Companions. Abu Ubaydah, the trustworthy one of the nation, was among the first to go, and after him Muadh was appointed leader. It was Muadh who narrated the hadith that

whoever dies of the plague dies a martyr. As the disease spread, he prayed that his own household be given the fullest share of this mercy.

The prayer was answered in the hardest way. His two daughters died. Then his two sons. Then his wife. His most beloved son, Abdur-Rahman, was being shaped into a scholar like his father, and Muadh, barely alive himself and now the last of his family standing, asked him, "How are you?" The boy did not complain of his pain. He answered with a verse of the Qur'an:

The truth is from your Lord, so do not be one of those who doubt.

QUR'AN 2:147

And Muadh answered him: you will find me, God willing, among the patient. The last words between a dying father and his dying son were two verses of the Book of Allah. Abdur-Rahman passed.

Muadh lived until the next morning. A man near him was weeping, and Muadh asked why. The man said: I am not crying for any worldly thing I used to gain from you; I am crying for the knowledge I used to take from you. Muadh told him not to grieve, and pointed him to four others from whom he could still seek knowledge. And when his own death came upon him, his final words were a supplication that no one could have scripted better. He said, in effect: O Allah, You know that my heart loves You, so take my soul. And he died as the words left him.

He was thirty-four years old.

What Muadh's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel only wonder, and to set Muadh so high above us that he asks nothing of our own lives. That would be a mistake. His life is not a monument. It is a question put to our iman.

The first thing his life asks is that we stop waiting. This man, beloved of the Prophet ﷺ and named the most knowledgeable of the nation, was thirty-four years old when he died. He reached all of it because, as a boy, he heard the call of Allah and His Messenger and answered it at once, with his whole heart. There is a quiet voice in all of us that says we will draw closer to Allah once life settles down, once we are older, once it is easier. Muadh's life closes that door. The man who prayed at night that his flight from the Fire was too slow and his pursuit of the Garden too weak was already among the foremost of the believers, and still he ran. If he ran, what excuse do we have to stroll?

The second thing it asks is sincerity, ikhlas, the doing of things for Allah alone. Wealth came to Muadh and he gave it away until it left no trace, never tallying it, never holding it back. He made even his sleep into worship by intending it for Allah. And when a stranger told him "I love you for the sake of Allah," he pressed three times to be sure it was for nothing else. He understood that the worth of a deed lies in who it is for. Ask yourself how much of what you do is shaped by the eyes of people, and how much you could redirect, quietly, to Allah alone.

The third thing his life asks is that we guard the tongue and use it for good. He narrated that the harvest of the tongue throws more people on their faces into the Fire than anything else, and then he showed the other side of it, defending an absent man from slander so that the man carried the gratitude for life. This is within reach of every one of us. Refuse one piece of gossip.

Defend one person who is not in the room. Say a true and kind word for the sake of Allah. The same instrument that ruins people can, turned the other way, raise them.

And the last thing, the thing that should steady your heart, is how Muadh and his son met death. The boy, dying, would not even describe his pain; he recited that the truth is from his Lord and that he would not be among the doubters. The father, the last of his family alive, having buried his wife and four children in days, did not accuse his Lord or ask why. He asked only to be counted among the patient, and then, with his final breath, told Allah that his heart loved Him and asked Him to take his soul. That is contentment with the decree of Allah at its very limit: faith that holds not because the circumstances are bearable but because the heart is anchored in Allah and not in what He gives or takes. When hardship reaches you, and it will, Muadh's life asks whether your trust in Allah can survive the loss of the very things you thought you could not live without.

So take one thing from him into your own ordinary days. Answer the call of Allah a little sooner than is comfortable. Give one thing for His sake that no one will ever know about. Hold your tongue from one wrong word and use it for one right one. And when something is taken from you, meet it the way he did, with patience and with love for the One who decreed it. That is how a boy became, as Ibn Mas'ud said of him, an entire nation in a single body, and it is a way still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Muadh ibn Jabal, raise us upon a measure of his faith, gather us among those who love one another for His sake, and join us to the company of the one he loved.

This chapter follows the account of Muadh ibn Jabal (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an

translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2:159, 2:147). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Zayd ibn Thabit

The Scribe of Revelation

Pick up a copy of the Qur'an. Hold it for a moment before you open it. Every time a believer anywhere on the earth lifts that book and begins to recite, a portion of the reward returns to one young man who is no longer alive to receive it in this world, because he is the one who gathered the Qur'an and saw it standardized and passed down, not once but twice. Every recitation, in every century and every land, adds to the account of a boy who began as a six-year-old orphan in Madinah and who measured the hours of his day not in minutes but in verses of the Book of Allah.

His name was Zayd ibn Thabit (may Allah be pleased with him), and to understand how a child came to carry the Qur'an for the entire ummah, you have to begin with a widowed mother and a dream.

A mother's dream, and an orphan's beginning

Zayd belonged to Bani Najjar, the same tribe from which the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ drew his maternal relatives. His father, Thabit, went out to fight on the day of Bu'ath, the great war that raged between the tribes of Madinah before Islam, and he was killed on that field. Zayd was six years old. Like the Prophet ﷺ himself, he became an orphan early.

The great figure in his life, the one who decided what he would become, was his mother. Her name was Nawar bint Malik, and she carried a story of her own. She said that while she was pregnant with Zayd she saw a dream: the Kaaba, and upon it a covering of green and yellow silk draped over the House of Allah. She took it as a sign that the child she carried would be someone rare, that Allah was going to give her, through this boy, something special. This was before Islam had reached her city. She did not yet know what her son would be, but she believed from the first that he would be exceptional, and she set about raising him to be exactly that.

The only narration preserved from Nawar herself is a small and tender one. She said her house was the tallest standing nearest to where the Prophet's mosque would one day be built, and that before the mosque existed, the call to prayer was given from her rooftop. That is the single saying we have from the mother of Zayd: that the adhan once rose into the sky from the top of her home. Years later the Prophet ﷺ himself would lead her funeral prayer. Everything you will hear about the son traces back to the quiet, deliberate investment of this mother.

She sent him to learn to read. At that time the most literate community in Madinah was the Jewish community, with its schools and scriptural learning, and Zayd had relatives who had taken on that faith before Islam. So she let him learn reading and writing among the children there, and he picked it up astonishingly young. In an age when even most grown men could not read or write, here was a six-year-old boy who could, quick and sharp, fast to grasp whatever was placed before him. His mother had been right about him before anyone else could see it.

Eleven years old, and the Qur'an already in his heart

When Islam came to Madinah through the teacher the Prophet ﷺ had sent ahead, Mus'ab ibn Umayr, Nawar accepted the faith, and her son with her. Zayd was eleven years old. And before the Prophet ﷺ had even arrived in the city, this boy had already memorized the entirety of what had been revealed of the Qur'an up to that point, learning it all from Mus'ab, with his mother behind him every step.

So when the Prophet ﷺ arrived, Nawar asked her relatives to take her son to him and let him recite. They brought the boy forward and said, here is a young boy of Bani Najjar, and he has seventeen surahs of the Qur'an he can recite to you from memory. Zayd would later tell it himself: he remembered sitting down in front of the Prophet ﷺ and reciting everything he had memorized, and the Prophet ﷺ was clearly pleased by what he heard from this literate child who already carried the revelation in his chest.

Then came a request that tells you what kind of boy this was. The Prophet ﷺ said to him: learn Hebrew for me. I want someone who can write between me and the Jewish tribes in their own language. An eleven-year-old, fresh from reciting the Qur'an, was now asked to acquire a foreign language, with no schools of grammar and no books to make it easy. Zayd went and learned it in about two weeks, enough to read, write, and communicate. Later the Prophet ﷺ asked whether he knew Syriac, the ancient tongue of much of the early scripture of the Jews and Christians; Zayd did not, so he learned it in seventeen days. In one narration the Prophet ﷺ asked him about Persian, and he learned that too, in sixteen days. He was, plainly, not an ordinary child. He became the one who could read and write in Arabic when most of the grown companions could not, and who could carry the Prophet's words to the surrounding communities in their own languages.

The boy turned away from battle

Zayd wanted more than language and learning. He wanted to fight alongside the Prophet ﷺ. He came on the day of Badr asking to march out, and the Prophet ﷺ sent him home, too young. His mother brought him back on the day of Uhud, and again he was told he was still too young. His older brother Yazid fought at Badr and would later die a martyr at Yamama, but Zayd himself was kept from the field by his age.

Here is the thing worth pausing on. A boy is brought to the Prophet ﷺ, says "I want to fight," and is told "you are too young." What does he do with that disappointment? He could have gone home and wasted his youth sulking. Instead he turned the whole of that energy toward the Qur'an. If he could not stand beside the Prophet ﷺ on the battlefield, he would make himself unmatched in his knowledge of the Book. And so, while still a teenager, he rose among the companions as the young man whose recitation and scholarship of the Qur'an had no equal. The door that was closed to him became the reason another opened wider than he could have imagined. Eventually, on the day of Khandaq, when he was about sixteen, the Prophet ﷺ let him fight. But by then his greatest service had already begun.

"Call Zayd, and bring the ink"

When revelation descended on the Prophet ﷺ, he would call for Zayd. The boy who had been turned away from war was now the one summoned the moment the Qur'an came. Where is Zayd, the Prophet ﷺ would say. Tell him to bring the ink pot and the parchment, and he will write what has come. So Zayd was there, at the side of the Prophet ﷺ, as the verses arrived fresh, setting them down and preserving them for everyone who would come after.

He became the most knowledgeable of the companions in the Qur'an, fluent in several languages, and something more besides. The Prophet ﷺ testified, in an authentic report, that the most knowledgeable of his ummah in the laws of inheritance was Zayd ibn Thabit. That, too, traces back to his mother, who had made sure he learned arithmetic, so that he grasped the intricate mathematics of inheritance that few others could hold in their minds. It was said the science might have been lost were it not for the way Zayd codified it and put it to use among the companions and the generation after them.

One of the most extraordinary moments he ever witnessed he described himself. The Qur'an, when it came upon the Prophet ﷺ, came with weight, and the companions could see its effect on him. Zayd said he was once sitting with the Prophet ﷺ, the Prophet's leg resting on his own, when the revelation began to descend. The leg grew so heavy that Zayd said he feared he would lose his own that day, the weight of the word of Allah pressing through the Prophet ﷺ onto a young man's knee. What was revealed in that moment was this:

Those believers who stay at home, apart from those with an incapacity, are not equal to those who commit themselves and their possessions to striving in God's way. God has raised such people to a rank above those who stay at home- although He has promised all believers a good reward, those who strive are favoured with a tremendous reward above those who stay at home-

QUR'AN 4:95

Zayd said that even years later, it was as though he could still see the very place on the parchment where the Prophet ﷺ had commanded him to write that verse down. Carry that image with

you. The man who recited the Qur'an to others could remember the actual weight of it, the exact moment it arrived, the precise spot where his own hand had recorded it. That is a closeness to the revelation almost no one else has ever had.

A young scholar the elders surrounded

Zayd carried himself in a way that drew the whole community to him while he was still young. He was cautious with his knowledge. When someone asked him a question, he would first ask: has this actually happened? If they said yes, he answered. If not, he told them to come back when it did. He had no patience for the endless hypotheticals that the learned can lose themselves in. He guarded what Allah had given him and spoke only to what was real.

He had also absorbed something of the Prophet's own manner. His son related that when young men asked him to teach them about the Prophet ﷺ, Zayd told them: when we sat with the Prophet ﷺ, if we spoke of worldly things, he spoke of them with us; if we spoke of the hereafter, he spoke of the hereafter; if we spoke of food, he spoke of food. He was, Zayd was saying, an approachable man, not someone who only ever lectured. And Zayd carried that same balance. It is said no one had more dignity when he sat among people than Zayd, and yet no one was more playful within his own home, the gravity of the scholar in public and the lightness of a kind man in private. That itself is a mark of what the companionship of the Prophet ﷺ had done to him.

Measure his attachment to the Qur'an by this. Asked once how long a stretch of time had passed between two prayers, he could have answered in some ordinary unit. Instead he said it was about the time it would take to recite fifty verses of the Qur'an.

He counted time in ayat. And when someone praised reciting the whole Qur'an in seven days, Zayd said that was good, but that he preferred to spread it over two weeks, so he could reflect on the verses as he recited them. The point was never speed. The point was contemplation.

There is a beautiful picture of how the companions treated him. The young Ibn Abbas, who would himself become known as the scholar of the ummah, would run to take the reins of Zayd's mount and guide it, saying, this is how we have been taught to treat our scholars. Then Zayd would take Ibn Abbas's hand and kiss it, saying, and this is how we treat the family of the Prophet ﷺ. Young men, both of them, honoring one another. The older companions named Zayd among the foremost in knowledge, among the very few who had a recognized school of thought of their own. He sat in judgment between disputing parties, broke down the hardest cases of inheritance, and could not be bribed or bought.

The trust no one else could carry

It had been unthinkable to the companions that the Qur'an could ever be lost. So many of them had it by heart that the fear simply did not arise. Then came the battle of Yamama against the false prophet Musaylima, in which Zayd himself fought and his older brother Yazid was killed. The losses were staggering, and among the fallen were many who had carried the Qur'an in their memories.

Umar went to Abu Bakr, troubled. So many bearers of the Qur'an had died at Yamama, he said, and he feared that in battles still to come, more would be killed and something of the Qur'an might be lost with them. He urged that it be gathered into an official, written compilation. Abu Bakr hesitated at first, asking how he

could do what the Prophet ﷺ himself had not done in this form. But Umar persisted, and Abu Bakr came to see this was not an innovation but a safeguard for what the Prophet ﷺ had taught them to write and to memorize. Then the two of them agreed on the one man fit to oversee the task.

Zayd was about twenty or twenty-one years old. They sat this young man down and told him they needed him to compile the Qur'an, and he was taken aback by the enormity of it. Abu Bakr said to him words that are among the finest testimonies one human being can give another: you are a young man, intelligent, and we find no fault in your character; you do not lie and you do not cheat, and we trust you; you were the one the Prophet ﷺ called to write the revelation. Imagine being twenty and hearing that from Abu Bakr, in the presence of Umar. Zayd said that if Abu Bakr had ordered him to move a mountain, it would not have weighed heavier on him than the task of gathering the Qur'an.

So he gathered it. He went through everything that had been written, checking it against the memories of those who had received it from the Prophet ﷺ directly, verifying again and again, source against source, in a discipline of review upon review. Within roughly a year of the Prophet's death he had brought the whole of it into a single authoritative volume, the very text from which the ummah would read thereafter. A young man of twenty had been entrusted with the most important task this ummah has ever known, and he had not failed it.

Years later, under the leadership of Uthman, the need arose a second time, for the opposite reason. Now the Qur'an was being recited in different regions in differing ways, and there was fear its standardization would fray. Once again a committee was formed, and once again Zayd was called to oversee it, keeping

the Qur'an in unified copies so that nothing could alter its recitation. Open the Qur'an today and what you hold, in its arrangement and preservation, is the work he oversaw. Twice the ummah faced the possibility of losing its hold on the Book, and twice the same man stepped forward to secure it.

Through it all he remained a jurist and a judge. When Umar traveled away from Madinah, he would leave Zayd in charge of the city, and so would Uthman after him. There is a striking story that once Umar himself, the leader of the believers, fell into a dispute over some land and agreed to be judged by Zayd, young enough to be his son. When Umar entered, Zayd began to make room for him out of respect, and Umar corrected him: do not show me favor, judge between us fairly. Even the Caliph stood as an equal before the truth.

When Uthman was besieged near the end of his life, Zayd was among those who stood to defend him, urging the people of Madinah not to take part in shedding his blood. And then, some forty-five years after the migration, well into the history he had helped preserve, he died in Madinah.

The day so much was buried

Few people in this history have had so many tributes spoken at their death. When Zayd passed away, the companions remembered the Prophet's warning that one of the signs of the approaching Day of Judgment is the death of the scholars, and that hadith rose to their minds. It was said on that day: the scholar of the people has died.

The most touching response came from Ibn Abbas, the student who had once guided Zayd's mount. When people came to console him as he sat in the shade, he said simply: this is what

the Prophet ﷺ meant about the death of the scholars. So much knowledge, he said, was just buried today. So much, buried. The people, it was said, were left now upon Zayd's recitation and Zayd's laws of inheritance, which is to say a scholar like this never truly dies; what he taught outlives him.

Hassan ibn Thabit, the poet of the Prophet ﷺ, stood at the funeral and gave the most fitting tribute of all. He asked: who is left to recite poetry greater than Hassan and his son? But who is left to recite al-Mathani, the oft-repeated verses of the Qur'an, after Zayd ibn Thabit? Even the master of poets bowed before what this man had carried.

His legacy lived on in his children, above all his son Kharijah ibn Zayd, one of the seven great jurists of Madinah, said to be a copy of his father in everything, even his handwriting. And it lived on, most of all, in the Book itself, handed down generation after generation, preserved on the page as it was preserved in the hearts of those who recite it.

What Zayd's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like Zayd's and feel it belongs to a different order of person, a genius child who learned languages in a fortnight and memorized the Qur'an before he was twelve, and to leave it there, admired and untouched. That would be to miss what his life is actually asking of us.

Begin with the door that was closed. Twice the boy came forward eager to give his life on the battlefield, and twice he was sent home as too young. He could have read that as Allah having no use for him. Instead he understood it as Allah pointing him somewhere else, and poured himself into the Qur'an with everything he had. The disappointment became the making of

him, and through it Allah prepared him for a service greater than any battle he could have fought. Your own life will close doors on you. Plans will fail, paths you wanted will be denied, and you will be tempted to read it as rejection. Zayd's life asks you to read it instead as redirection, to trust that the One who closed the door has another work for you, and to throw yourself into the good that remains open. He was being prepared in the years he thought he was only waiting. So are you.

Then there is the way he held his knowledge, for Allah and not for himself. He refused to perform his learning for show, refused to bend a ruling for power even when the Caliph stood before him. When he was handed the heaviest trust the ummah has ever carried, he received it not as a conquest but as a weight that felt like moving a mountain, and discharged it with patient, exhausting honesty, seeking no glory in it. That is ikhlas, sincerity: doing the work for the sake of Allah and being content that He has seen it. Ask what you do for the eyes of people, and what you would still do if no one ever knew your name was attached to it. Zayd's reward flows to him from every recitation on earth precisely because he was not seeking a reward from the people who watched.

And take from him his nearness to the Book of Allah. This was a man who counted his hours in verses, who slowed his recitation so he could reflect rather than race, who remembered the very weight of revelation on his knee. We hold the same Qur'an he gathered, and most of us hold it at arm's length, opening it rarely and reading it quickly when we do. The Book he risked his whole reputation to preserve is within your reach right now. You do not need to be a genius to honor it. You need only open it, recite a little of it today with attention, slow down enough to let one verse

reach your heart, and let it shape how you live before the next prayer.

So carry one thing from him into an ordinary day. When a door closes on you, trust that Allah is turning you toward another good, and work at that good instead of grieving the loss. Do one act for Allah alone that no one will ever credit to you. And open the Qur'an that he gathered, and read a few verses slowly, for the sake of the One who sent them down. May Allah be pleased with Zayd ibn Thabit, and with the mother who saw what he would become, reward him for every recitation his hands preserved, and join us in the company of those who loved His Book and lived by it. Ameen.

This chapter follows the account of Zayd ibn Thabit (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (4:95). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Nusaybah bint Ka'b

The Mother of Sacrifice

There is a moment on the field of Uhud, after the Muslims have been broken and scattered, after the cry has gone up that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has been killed, when most of the best generation of believers is fleeing in every direction. Swords are falling on the necks of men. Blood is in the dust. And into that chaos, against the current of everyone running out, a woman runs in. She drops the bucket of water she carried for the wounded, picks up a fallen sword and shield, and pushes toward the place where the Prophet ﷺ is standing. Years later the Prophet ﷺ would say that on that day, wherever he looked, to his right and his left, in front of him and behind him, he saw her. He saw Nusaybah bint Ka'b, swinging her sword.

There is, in the whole record of the companions, no other story quite like hers. The great names are known for many things. She is known for one: the battlefield.

A woman with nothing recorded but courage

Her name is Nusaybah bint Ka'b ibn Amr al-Ansariyyah (may Allah be pleased with her), and she carried the title Umm Umarah, the mother of Umarah. Both Nusaybah and Nasibah are recorded as correct pronunciations of her name, and she belonged to Banu Najjar, a subtribe of the Khazraj of Madinah. Banu Najjar were the maternal relatives of the Prophet ﷺ, the

family that, by the standards of that time and place, held a special closeness and affection for him. Hassan ibn Thabit was of them, and Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, and Umm Sulaym the mother of Anas ibn Malik.

We know almost nothing of her early life. Her parents seem to have died before Islam ever reached the city. What we know begins with faith. Her brothers Abdullah ibn Ka'b and Abdur-Rahman ibn Ka'b were among the first of the Ansar to accept Islam, present at every battle at the Prophet's side. Abdur-Rahman in particular is counted among al-bakka'in, the weepers who wept at Tabuk because they had no means to march out and could not bear to be left behind. That longing to be at the Prophet's side ran in her family like a current in the blood.

She had two husbands across her life, and both were companions. Her first husband, Zayd ibn Asim, gave her two famous sons who would carry the rest of her story: Habib ibn Zayd and Abdullah ibn Zayd. Her second husband, Ghaziyah ibn Amr, gave her a son named Tamim and a daughter named Khawlah, of whom little is recorded. When Islam at last reached the city, every one of them, husband and sons, accepted it at once.

The woman who would not pledge by proxy

She first heard the message of Islam from Mus'ab ibn Umayr, who had come to Yathrib to teach its people about this new call from Makkah. Picture her in that first gathering, hearing the words for the first time. And then watch what she does next, because her character is already there, complete, from the very start.

When the time came for the great pledge, she did not wait for the Prophet ﷺ to come to her. She went to him. Seventy men of Madinah made the daunting secret journey to Makkah to meet the Prophet ﷺ privately during the Hajj season and to pledge themselves to him at the second pledge of Aqabah. It was understood that when these men pledged, they pledged on behalf of their households. That would have been enough for most. It was not enough for her. She insisted on going herself, on giving her own word with her own tongue, and she even brought her young children along, gearing them from their earliest years toward this very idea of sacrifice.

Ka'b ibn Malik, who was there, narrates that they were seventy men and with them two women: Nusaybah bint Ka'b, Umm Umarah, and Asma bint Amr, known as Umm Mani'. When the seventy men had taken the pledge by the hand of the Prophet ﷺ, her husband Ghaziyah told him that these two women had come to pledge as well. The Prophet ﷺ accepted their pledge with the same words he had given the men, taking it verbally, and he said, "I do not shake hands with women." So that famous statement of his was first spoken here, at Aqabah, to a woman who had crossed a desert to give her word.

This is the earliest clear image we have of her, and it tells you everything. She would not stand at a distance and let someone else carry her faith for her. She came forward herself.

The day she ran toward the Prophet

When Badr came, she was not present, and neither were her children, still too young to fight, though her husbands and her brothers were among the believers there. But then came Uhud, and Uhud would open a door in her life that never closed again.

She lived long enough that people would come to her in Madinah, even into old age, to ask her about that day. And when she told it, she told it as though she were standing in it still. "I can see it," she would say, "as if I am looking at it right now." It was the most defining day of her life, and she never lost a single detail of it.

She remembered the three hundred hypocrites who turned back before the battle even began, leaving the Prophet ﷺ with seven hundred men out of a thousand. She remembered the three thousand of the disbelievers coming forward. When people asked her whether the women of the other side had fought, she answered that none of them ever raised a hand except to beat the drums and sing the songs of the days of ignorance. The enemy had brought their women to make a spectacle. But the believing women had come for something else entirely.

She was there with a group of the female companions, and she names them with reverence, because the list itself is a lesson: Aisha, Fatimah, Umm Salamah, Safiyyah bint Abdul Muttalib the aunt of the Prophet ﷺ, and Umm Sulaym. The Prophet ﷺ had not hidden his own family away in safety. They were out on that field with water and medical supplies, ready to run into the fighting and treat the wounded. And her own husband and her two sons, now old enough at last, stood near the Prophet ﷺ, ready to fight. Her whole family was on that field as the battle began.

This was the day Allah revealed of the believers who were true to their covenant with Him:

There are men among the believers who honoured their pledge to God: some of them have fulfilled it by death, and some are still waiting. They have not changed in the least.

QUR'AN 33:23

Some of the scholars of tafsir note that when the word for "men" is used in a context of righteousness like this, it does not mean males alone but the believers, men and women together, who were true to what they promised Allah. And among the people this verse describes, they say, is Umm Umarah.

For the archers were the strategic advantage of the Muslims, and the Prophet ﷺ had told them plainly not to leave the hill until he commanded it, even if they saw the enemy being cut to pieces. When victory seemed certain, forty of the fifty came down for the spoils. The back of the army lay open. Khalid ibn al-Walid swept the cavalry around the mountain and struck from behind. In an instant the field was pandemonium. The cry went up that the Prophet ﷺ had been killed. Some men put their weapons down and wept. Most ran.

And here is the thing to sit with. What makes a person look at all of that, at the swords falling and the blood and the strongest men fleeing, and decide to go in rather than out? You might say it was her husband and her two sons still in the thick of it. But that is not what she said. She said that when she saw the people fleeing, her first thought was the Prophet ﷺ. Not her own sons.

The Prophet ﷺ once said that none of us truly believes until he loves the Messenger ﷺ more than his own children, his own parents, his own self. With Nusaybah you see it made flesh. Her love for him outweighed even a mother's instinct to run to her children, and so, without weighing it, she went toward him.

She called out to a fleeing man, "Give your weapons to someone who will fight for the Prophet ﷺ." He threw them down. She took up a shield and a sword and dove in. When she reached the Prophet ﷺ, she said, there were no more than ten or so people left around him, and among them were her husband and her two

sons, throwing stones when their weapons were gone, doing whatever they could to keep the enemy off him.

Thirteen wounds, and a prayer worth more than the world

She did not fight timidly. The Prophet ﷺ would later say he looked in every direction and saw her swinging her sword, and that she was better that day than so-and-so and so-and-so, naming known warriors among the men. She got into the very midst of it.

Her son Abdullah was struck and fell bleeding. She ran to him, bound his wound with her own hands, and told him, "Stand up and fight for the Prophet ﷺ." Then she took up her sword again. The Prophet ﷺ, watching, said, "Who could do what you do, Umm Umarah?" When he pointed out the man who had wounded her son, she went after him and struck him down so the companions could finish him, and the Prophet ﷺ smiled and praised Allah, who had let her see her revenge with her own eyes.

She stood in the path of Ibn Qami'ah, the furious horseman who, after killing Mus'ab ibn Umayr and realizing he was not the Prophet ﷺ, charged toward the Prophet ﷺ himself, screaming that he would not live if Muhammad lived. She took a stab at him and missed, for he wore two coats of armor, and he brought his sword down on her shoulder. She was wounded thirteen times that day, and the gash on her shoulder was so deep that it took her a full year to heal. She had bled for him in thirteen places.

And she had watched Mus'ab ibn Umayr fall, the same man who had first brought Islam to her city and taught her the faith in that first gathering, now struck down before her eyes as he drew the enemy away from the Prophet ﷺ.

When the Prophet ﷺ saw her wounded, he called to her son, "The son of Umm Umarah, your mother, your mother." And Abdullah, whom she had just bandaged, ran now to bind her wounds, and she rose again and kept fighting. The Prophet ﷺ looked at this small handful who never left him and saw that one whole family was among them: a woman, her husband, and her two sons, all wounded, all swinging their swords for his sake. And he said of them, "What a household. What a family this is."

And here is the heart of it. In the middle of all that, hearing him praise her family, she did not ask for a way out. She asked him for something else entirely. "O Messenger of Allah, ask Allah that we will be with you in Paradise." In the midst of the blood and the dying, that is what she wanted. And the Prophet ﷺ raised his hands and said, "O Allah, make them my companions in Paradise."

Her reply is one of the purest things a believer ever said. "O Messenger of Allah," she answered, "I do not care what happens to me in this world after this." The Prophet ﷺ had asked Allah to make her his companion in Paradise, and so whatever came, she did not care. That is faith. That is certainty. That is a heart that has weighed this world against the promise of Allah and found this world weightless.

The son crucified, and the mother who would not stay home
You might think a life that gave so much at Uhud had given enough. Hers had only begun. From that day no one could tell her she did not belong on the battlefield, and no one tried. She was present at Hudaibiyyah, at Khaybar, at Khandaq, at Hunayn. When a battle came, she took up her sword and went.

She is the one who came to the Prophet ﷺ with a question many women carried in their hearts. In a narration in Tirmidhi she asked, "O Messenger of Allah, I see that everything is for the men, and I do not see the women mentioned with anything." A woman who had stood in the trench beside him at Uhud was asking whether Allah would name the women too. And Allah revealed the answer:

For men and women who are devoted to God- believing men and women, obedient men and women, truthful men and women, steadfast men and women, humble men and women, charitable men and women, fasting men and women, chaste men and women, men and women who remember God often- God has prepared forgiveness and a rich reward.

QUR'AN 33:35

Then came the harder test. Near the end of the Prophet's life arose Musaylimah the liar, the most dangerous of the false prophets, who claimed prophethood for himself and grew a great following, and who tried to bargain with the Prophet ﷺ that they should split the earth and be co-messengers. The Prophet ﷺ sent him a letter by the hand of an ambassador, and the ambassador he chose was Habib ibn Zayd, the son of Nusaybah.

When Habib stood before Musaylimah and read the letter, Musaylimah asked, "Do you bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah?" Habib said, "Yes." "Do you bear witness that I am the messenger of Allah?" Habib answered, "I cannot hear you." Three times Musaylimah asked, each time louder and more threatening, and three times Habib gave the same answer: yes to the Prophet ﷺ, and "I cannot hear you" to the liar. So Musaylimah, to terrify his own followers, had Habib bound and

cut to pieces while he was still alive, limb by limb, and the entire time Habib was saying, "I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah."

Now someone had to bring his mother the news, not only that her son was dead, but how he had died. And when it reached Nusaybah, listen to what she said. "For this very moment I prepared him, and with Allah I have sought my reward for him. He took the pledge with the Prophet ﷺ on the night of Aqabah as a young man, and as a grown man he kept his loyalty to it today." But she was also a wounded mother, and she added, "If Allah gives me the chance to reach Musaylimah, I will make his daughters grieve for him as he made me grieve."

So when Abu Bakr called the believers to march against Musaylimah at the battle of Yamamah, she went. She was over sixty years old, and she went with her remaining son, Abdullah, swearing to be present at the reckoning. Before the fortress they called the fortress of death, she pressed forward crying out, "Where is the enemy of Allah? Show me where he is."

It was Wahshi who threw the spear that struck Musaylimah down, the same spear he had once thrown at Hamza, now turned in repentance against the worst of men. But the one who finished Musaylimah was Abdullah ibn Zayd, her son, the brother of the boy Musaylimah had dismembered. She saw it happen. She said, "All praise is to Allah, who let me see the enemy of Allah taken from this earth."

But this was a day of sacrifice too. At Yamamah she lost her arm. And she said, "I sought my reward from Allah for one of my two sons, and I seek my reward from Allah for one of my two hands." She kept fighting with one arm and was wounded in eleven places, and still, by the mercy of Allah, she did not die. When

Yarmouk came, she went out again and fought with the one hand that could hold a sword. She would not stay back. She lived into old age and died a natural death, buried in Baqi in Madinah. It is said that when Umar received the finest gift any foreign emissary ever sent him, he passed it to Nusaybah as the most deserving person in the ummah, for he had heard the Prophet ﷺ say that wherever he looked at Uhud, he saw her swinging her sword.

What Nusaybah's life asks of our faith

It is tempting to read a life like this and feel only awe, to place her so far above us that she becomes a statue rather than a summons. She did not survive thirty wounds and bury a son so that we could admire her from a safe distance. Her life is a question put directly to our own iman.

Look first at the thing that moved her in the chaos of Uhud. When everyone else thought of escape, she thought of the Prophet ﷺ. Her love for him, and through him her love for Allah, was larger than her fear, larger even than her instinct to protect her own children. Most of us guard our hearts carefully, giving Allah and His Messenger ﷺ whatever is left after we have secured ourselves. She gave first, and held nothing back. The question her life asks is whether the love of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ sits at the center of your heart or out at the edge of it, behind your comfort and your fear.

Look next at what she said when she was bleeding and her family was being praised. She did not ask for safety. She asked, "Ask Allah that we will be with you in Paradise," and when the Prophet ﷺ made that prayer, she said she no longer cared what happened to her in the dunya. That is the contentment, the *ridha*, that turns a believer unbreakable. It is the same spirit in which she met the news of her son's death, saying she had prepared

him for exactly this and had sought her reward with Allah, and in which she gave her arm at Yamamah and counted it a thing offered for His sake. She did not measure her losses against her comfort. She measured them against Paradise, and they came out light. When loss comes to you, and it will, her life asks whether your trust in Allah is deep enough to hand Him the thing you love and say, with your whole heart, that you sought your reward from Him.

And notice what she truly wanted. Not to be remembered, not to be praised, though praise came. She wanted nearness to Allah and to His Messenger ﷺ. She prepared her son for sacrifice quietly, years before it was asked of him. She crossed a desert to give her own pledge when no one required it. None of it was for an audience. That is ikhlas, the rarest and most precious thing a person can carry: to do the deed for Allah, content that He has seen it.

So take something from her into your ordinary life, where there is no battlefield and no sword to lift. Put the love of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ before your own ease in one real decision today: the prayer you would rather delay, the truth you would rather not speak, the wealth you would rather keep. Hand one loss back to Allah without a word of complaint, seeking your reward only from Him. Do one good thing no one will ever know about, purely for His sake, the way she prepared her son in private long before the world heard his name. She ran toward the Prophet ﷺ when everyone else ran away. We are asked, in the small chaos of our own days, to keep turning toward Allah when it would be easier to turn away. May Allah be pleased with Nusaybah bint Ka'b and with her family, and just as the Prophet ﷺ asked Allah to make them his companions in Paradise, may Allah make us, and her,

and all who love Him, the companions of His Messenger ﷺ in the highest gardens.

This chapter follows the account of Nusaybah bint Ka'b (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (33:23, 33:35). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Hassan ibn Thabit

The Poet of the Prophet

If you walked into the mosque of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in those years, you would see the pulpit from which he spoke to his people. And then, a few feet away, you would see a second pulpit. It was not built for sermons. It was built so that one man could climb it and stand above the gathering, and when the enemies of the Prophet ﷺ struck at him with poetry, this man would answer them. The Prophet ﷺ was always patient with those who insulted him. He rarely answered an insult in kind. But he placed a poet on a pulpit in his own mosque, and through that poet he let the truth be defended in the one art the Arabs valued above all others.

The man on the pulpit was Hassan ibn Thabit, and most of the believers who came after him would call him the greatest poet who ever lived. His is not a story of unbroken glory. It is something rarer, and in a strange way more useful to us: the story of a man who reached a height few have ever reached, who was supported by an angel in his craft, and who then stumbled into one of the most painful errors a believer can fall into, and was caught, forgiven, and lifted back up. There is not a moment in his life when we are entitled to think ourselves better than him. There is a great deal in it that speaks directly to us.

The poet the whole world knew

Hassan came from Banu Najjar, the maternal relatives of the Prophet ﷺ in Madinah, which made him a distant kinsman of the Messenger himself. He belonged to the tribe of Khazraj, and he was famous as a poet from a very young age. His fame was not the small fame of a town. It was probably true of no other poet from that region: the whole world knew his name.

Madinah in those days was a city of two great Arab tribes, Aws and Khazraj, who had spilled each other's blood for generations. Hassan was the poet of Khazraj. His counterpart among Aws was a man named Qays ibn al-Khatim, who lived to hear of Islam but died without embracing it. When the two tribes fought with spears and arrows, their poets fought too, and Hassan's weapon was words. His poetry was not gentle. It would take an enemy and split him into pieces, expose every flaw of his family and his lineage and his person, and leave nothing standing.

A poet like that does not stay in one city. Hassan began to be summoned by the kings of the earth. He went to the Ghassanid courts in Syria and composed for them. He had verses for the Romans, and he travelled to the Persians, the great rivals of Rome, and composed for them too. He moved among the elites of the world, and no poet alive could stand against him. This was his reputation: the man who, for the right price, could humiliate anyone.

There is something worth noticing in his family before we go further. Both of his parents and all eight of his siblings became Muslim. His father, Mundhir, embraced Islam in his eighties and is counted among the veterans of Badr, which would make him one of the oldest companions present at that battle. His mother was so known for her intellect that Hassan would sometimes call himself the son of al-Furay'ah, naming himself after her. His

brothers fought in the battles and died as martyrs. His sisters became companions; one of them narrates a single, tender hadith, that the Prophet ﷺ visited her home and drank from a waterskin hanging there, and she cut away the very part of the skin his lips had touched and kept it with her for the rest of her life. Eight siblings, every one of them Muslim. As anyone with more than one child can tell you, they do not all turn out the same way, and the story of Hassan will show us how different a single family can be.

The man who could not see the battlefield

When the Prophet ﷺ arrived in Madinah, Hassan was sixty years old. That fact alone is worth pausing on, because old men were not common in Madinah. The tribal wars had killed off the elders; men of his age had cut each other down in the feuds before Islam. Hassan survived them, and one reason offered by the scholars is striking: he is said never to have picked up a sword in his life, not before Islam and not after it. He was seven years older than the Prophet ﷺ himself.

Now the story takes a turn that reveals the man. There were people in Madinah who were not pleased to see this Prophet rising out of Makkah, and some of them hired Hassan. They gave him money and told him to do what he did best: find the man, study him, and tear him apart in verse. Leave nothing out, they said. The way he walks, the way he talks, his features, his background, all of it.

So Hassan went out to wait for the Prophet ﷺ. He had seen impressive men in the palaces of kings; he was not easily moved. But when his eyes fell on the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, something in him gave way. He had nothing bad to say. The poem that has come down from him reads, in plain English: my eye has never

seen anything more beautiful than you, and no woman has ever given birth to one more lovely. You were created free of every flaw, as if you were made exactly as you wished to be. Whether or not he spoke these lines on that first day, they tell us what happened inside him. He looked for a flaw to mock and found none. This is the man, he decided. I have nothing to say against him.

And yet, when battle came, Hassan could not go. This was not laziness or wavering faith. More than one of the early authors records that he never witnessed a single battle alongside the Prophet ﷺ, which points to something deeper than reluctance: a genuine, gripping fear of the battlefield, an anxiety he could not master. The Prophet ﷺ understood it and let him stay back.

How real that fear was comes through in one unforgettable scene. During the Battle of the Trench, the women and children were gathered in a fortress for safety, and among them, an old man now near seventy, was Hassan. With them was Safiyyah bint Abd al-Muttalib (may Allah be pleased with her), the aunt of the Prophet ﷺ and the mother of az-Zubayr, a woman who had raised her son alone and was known for her strength. She saw an enemy approaching to attack them from within and asked Hassan to deal with the man. He answered, may Allah forgive you, daughter of Abd al-Muttalib, this is not what I am made for. So this elderly woman took a pole, waited until the man reached the door, struck him on the head, dragged his body inside, and told Hassan to go and strip the man of his weapons. He could not even do that. So she took the corpse herself and threw it over the wall, and when the attackers outside saw a body come flying, they assumed an army was inside and fled. It was Hassan who narrated this story afterward, against himself. His battle was never going to be fought with a sword. His battle was his tongue.

When the angel stood with him

As the enemies of the Prophet ﷺ began composing verses against him, the art of the Arabs turned into a weapon aimed at Madinah. Some of the companions wanted to answer. One of them, a capable man, offered to respond, but the Prophet ﷺ knew this was not his particular gift; he was eloquent but had no real experience in this kind of poetry. So the Prophet ﷺ looked around the gathering. He asked what was stopping the men who had defended him with their weapons from defending him with their tongues. And Hassan understood that the call was for him. In one narration he simply said: I will, and the Prophet ﷺ told him to respond, and that the angel would support him. This task is yours, Hassan.

This was the art Hassan had set aside when he became Muslim, and now it was being handed back to him for the sake of Allah. But before he began, the Prophet ﷺ raised a difficulty that went to the very root of Hassan's method. How will you attack them, he asked, when I am one of them? Hassan's whole craft was lineage; he tore people apart by their tribe and their ancestors, and the Prophet ﷺ shared that ancestry with Quraysh. Hassan answered with the image of a craftsman: I will pull you out from among them the way a hair is drawn out of dough. I will go after them and leave you untouched. The Prophet ﷺ sent him to Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), who knew the lineage of every family and subtribe of Makkah.

You can almost see Hassan sitting with Abu Bakr, taking notes, mapping every branch of Quraysh. Then he stood and composed, dissecting tribe after tribe with perfect precision, naming the maternal and paternal lines exactly where it cut deepest, and somehow never once touching the Prophet ﷺ. The

people of Makkah heard it and said: Abu Bakr has a hand in this. There is no way a poet from Madinah knows all of this about us.

One of his answers to Abu Sufyan is recorded in Sahih Muslim, and the Prophet ﷺ himself had told him to deliver it. You mocked Muhammad, Hassan says, and I answer on his behalf, and I look to Allah for my reward. You mocked a man of virtue and righteousness, the Messenger of Allah, whose nature is loyalty and nobility. As the scholars put it, the lion does not answer the barking of a dog; you may keep barking, but you have insulted a man in whom no fault can be found. He pours his own father and mother and honour out in the Prophet's defence. He praises the horses of the believers surging toward Makkah, their riders thirsting with zeal, and he tells the Makkans plainly: if you had left us alone, we would have come in peace for pilgrimage, and the darkness would have lifted; but since you would not, then be ready for a day in which Allah honours whom He wills. He ends with words that strip the enemy of any power to wound: whether you insult the Prophet ﷺ or praise him, it makes no difference, for the Messenger of Allah is among us, and the angel Jibril has no equal. Gather whoever you wish, he is saying. We have Jibril.

About this man the Prophet ﷺ prayed, O Allah, support him with the Holy Spirit, and he told the people that whenever Hassan stood to speak in defence of the Messenger, the angel stood with him. Hassan was not a warrior. But in the one thing he could do, he had an edge no enemy could match, and Heaven itself reinforced him.

The slip of a quick tongue

What happens next is a warning to anyone who thinks his faith has placed him beyond the reach of the devil. The very man who defended the honour of the Prophet ﷺ in verse fell into the

slander against the Prophet's own household. When the lie was spread against our mother Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), Hassan was among those who repeated it.

It is important to be exact about what happened, because the lesson lives in the detail. Hassan did not invent the slander. That was the work of the chief of the hypocrites, who manufactured it to throw the household of the Prophet ﷺ into scandal. What Hassan did was fail to hold his tongue when the rumour reached him. He heard it, and he passed it on. Step back and the lesson becomes sharp: a man's greatest strength can become his greatest weakness. Hassan's gift was a quick tongue and a quick, combative mind, ready to seize on what came to it and fire it back. In this one moment, that very gift betrayed him. And he was an old man now, his filters thinner with age, so that a thing came in and went out before it could be weighed. The Qur'an warns us against meeting a rumour with our tongues before we have stopped to verify it, and Hassan, of all people, was caught by exactly that.

He was not alone. Two other righteous companions fell into it as well, neither of them a hypocrite. One was Mistah, a poor relative whom Abu Bakr supported every single day, and who repaid that kindness by repeating the lie about Abu Bakr's own daughter. The other was Hamnah, caught up in it through family loyalty. These were not the enemies of Madinah, from whom such things were expected and quietly dismissed. These were companions, and that is precisely why their words did so much harm. When poison comes from a known enemy, it is easy to discard. When it comes from within, it carries a credit it does not deserve, and it becomes far harder to set aside.

When the revelation finally came clearing Aisha, Abu Bakr learned that Mistah had been among those who spread the lie, and he swore he would never again give the man a penny of charity. Then Allah revealed the verse that turned his heart:

Those who have been graced with bounty and plenty should not swear that they will [no longer] give to kinsmen, the poor, those who emigrated in God's way: let them pardon and forgive. Do you not wish that God should forgive you? God is most forgiving and merciful.

QUR'AN 24:22

Abu Bakr's answer was immediate: yes, by Allah, I love that He should forgive me. And he resumed his support of the very man who had slandered his daughter, vowing to spend on him for as long as he lived. That is the air in which Hassan's story breathes. He had committed not merely a sin, but the sin of slander; and not against any person, but against the household of the Prophet ﷺ. And still a way back was opened for him.

A man defended by the woman he wronged

Hassan was punished for what he did. The penalty was carried out, and yet he was not cast out of the community or stripped of his place in it. He felt the weight of his error, and he tried to make amends with the gift he had. He composed verses in praise of Aisha, describing a chaste and pious woman who never backbites anyone, who would sooner go hungry than feed on the flesh of the innocent, the way the Qur'an likens gossip to devouring the dead. He praised her purity and her noble origins and declared that Allah had cleansed her of every falsehood. And he swore against himself: if I had said what they claim I said, may my hand never be able to lift a whip again. Some of the scholars

read this as Hassan saying that he was never one of the ringleaders. Yes, I made a mistake and repeated it when it reached me, he is admitting, and I should have done better; but if I had been one of those who originated this filth and drove it forward, then may Allah leave me unable to walk another step. He bound himself by an oath that as long as he lived, his passion would be to defend the Prophet ﷺ and his family, the best of all who ever lived.

The truly remarkable thing is what Aisha did. The woman he had wounded became his defender. When visitors thought they were honouring her by attacking him, she stopped them. Do not say anything bad about Hassan, she would tell them; he is blind and elderly now, and he used to defend the Messenger of Allah. And she added an oath of hope for him: I swear by Allah, I hope that Allah admits him into Paradise for the lines he composed against Abu Sufyan in the Prophet's defence.

There is even a moment that captures the honesty of these people without dimming their mercy. When Hassan would recite, in Aisha's presence, that line about the woman who never backbites, she once gently reminded him: but you are not like that, you slipped. She would defend him fiercely against those who attacked him, and at the same time she would not let the past be papered over as if nothing had happened. Both things were true at once, and both were held with grace.

Hassan lived to be a hundred and twenty years old and lost his sight in his later years. Toward the end of his life he noticed that some people were not treating him as they should, and he turned to a companion who was present and asked, by Allah, did you not hear the Prophet ﷺ say, O Hassan, O Allah, support him with the Holy Spirit? The man answered, by Allah, I heard it. The point was

made. This is not a man to be put down for one mistake. This is a man who strove beside the Prophet ﷺ with himself and with his tongue.

What Hassan's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read the lives of the companions as a row of flawless monuments and to come away feeling that they belong on a shelf too high to reach. Hassan's life refuses to let us do that. He shows us a believer who fell, and who was caught. His story is not a monument. It is a question put directly to our own iman.

The first thing his life asks is whether we believe that the door of return is truly open to us. Hassan did not commit a small or quiet sin. He helped spread a slander against the household of the Prophet ﷺ, and the scholars note that the path back from such a sin is as steep as the sin is grave. And yet the Prophet ﷺ made a way back for him, and Abu Bakr forgave him, and Aisha defended him, and Allah accepted his repentance, and history records him not as the man who slandered but as the man who defended the Messenger of Allah. This is the mercy of the religion you belong to. Whatever you have done, the verse that turned Abu Bakr's heart is speaking to you too: do you not wish that Allah should forgive you? If you wish it, then turn to Him in earnest, repair what you can, and do not let the devil tell you that one fall has placed you beyond return. It has not.

The second thing his life asks is what you are doing with the one gift Allah has handed you. Hassan could not fight. He could not even strip a fallen enemy of his weapons. But he had a tongue and a craft, and he had a choice. The hypocrites would have paid him handsomely to aim that craft at the Prophet ﷺ; he could have joined the ranks of those who wounded the Messenger and been celebrated and rich for it. Instead he climbed the pulpit in

the mosque and used his gift for the sake of Allah. You have a gift too, some ability that is yours, and the question is not whether it is impressive but where you point it. The same skill can be sold to the world or offered to your Lord. Hassan offered his, and an angel stood beside him every time he did.

The third thing his life asks is harder, because it cuts close. Your greatest strength can become the doorway through which the devil reaches you. The very quickness of tongue that made Hassan the Prophet's defender was the quickness that let a rumour pass through him before he could weigh it. None of us is safe from this. Before you repeat the thing you heard, before you pass along the report that arrived so conveniently confirming what you already suspected, stop. Verify it, or let it die with you. Guarding the tongue from one piece of gossip, for no other reason than that Allah is watching, is a small act of worship available to every one of us today.

And there is one last detail, almost an aside, that may be the most quietly devastating in his whole life. Not a single line of the poetry Hassan composed for the tyrants and kings of the world has survived. The verses that earned him fame across Rome and Persia and the Arab courts are gone, scattered to the dustbins of history. What remains, recited and loved fourteen centuries later, is the poetry he composed for the sake of Allah. There is the whole truth of a life in that. What is done for the world, however brilliant, is written on water. What is done for Allah, He preserves. So spend yourself on what He keeps. Aim your gift where it lasts. May Allah be pleased with Hassan ibn Thabit, forgive him his slip as He forgave it in his own lifetime, and make us among those who defend the Messenger ﷺ and use every gift we are given for the One who gave it.

This chapter follows the account of Hassan ibn Thabit (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (24:22). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Ka'b ibn Malik

The One Whom the Truth Saved

Forty years after the event, an old, blind man sat in the mosque of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in Madinah. His sons walked him there and back, for his eyes had failed him long ago, and around him gathered the children and grandchildren of a vanishing generation, who wanted to hear what those glorious days had felt like. He had ridden out on the night of the pledge at Aqabah. He had been wounded seventeen times standing beside the Prophet ﷺ at Uhud. He had been praised by the Messenger of Allah ﷺ for words that Allah Himself had recorded in the heavens. And yet, when his son asked him to tell the story for which he was most remembered, the old man did not begin with any of his victories. He began with the worst mistake of his life, and somewhere in the telling, in a voice still raw after four decades, he said of the morning the army left without him: I wish I had gone.

His name was Ka'b ibn Malik, and his life teaches something no list of battles could teach on its own: that a believer's worth is measured not only by his finest hour, but by what he does in the hour he falls.

A poet of the Ansar

Ka'b ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) belonged to the Ansar, the helpers of Madinah. Both his parents died before the

message of Islam reached the city, but the faith reached his household all the same, and through Ka'b his two brothers also entered Islam and became companions of the Prophet ﷺ. He would marry over the course of his long life and raise more than eleven children, and one of his sons, Abdullah, became a well-known narrator of hadith, passing on from his father the very story we are about to hear.

What set Ka'b apart from the beginning was the timing of his belief. He was among the first people of Madinah to embrace Islam, and he was there on the night of the second pledge at Aqabah, when roughly seventy men slipped into Makkah during the season of Hajj to pledge themselves to a man their own people had outlawed. There was no safety in that night, no advantage, nothing to be gained in the eyes of the world. Ka'b would later say that he would not trade that night for the day of Badr itself, because he had given his word to the Prophet ﷺ when it cost everything and promised nothing. That is the kind of man he was at the start.

He was also a poet, one of the three poets of the Prophet ﷺ, and his genre was the poetry of war. While another of the three specialised in exposing the faults of the enemy and a third in defending faith against disbelief, Ka'b composed verses of strength and courage, declaring what the believers had done and would yet do, warning the opposing armies before a single sword was drawn. It is said that some who heard the confidence in his verses laid down their arms and accepted Islam before any fighting began. When the Prophet ﷺ honoured the new arrivals by pairing each Muhajir with an Ansari, he paired Ka'b with az-Zubayr ibn al-Awwam (may Allah be pleased with him), his own disciple and one of the two destined to be his neighbours in Paradise. To be chosen as the host and brother of a man like az-

Zubayr told everyone, at once, the rank Ka'b held in the sight of the Prophet ﷺ.

Seventeen wounds at Uhud

Ka'b went on to stand with the Prophet ﷺ in every major battle but two. He missed Badr, and he himself explained that the Prophet ﷺ did not reproach anyone for missing it, because Badr was never meant to become a battle: the believers had set out only to intercept a caravan, and Allah turned it into something far greater. The other he missed was Tabuk, and that absence would become the heart of his story.

But Uhud he did not miss. When the tide of that day turned, when the archers left their posts and Khalid ibn al-Walid swept the cavalry around behind the Muslims and the lines broke, Ka'b was among those who did not run. He stayed beside the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and was struck again and again, seventeen serious wounds in all. He and az-Zubayr, wounded both, held each other up and kept moving through the chaos, so close that day that az-Zubayr, under the pact of brotherhood between Muhajir and Ansari, would have inherited from him had he died.

Ka'b carried a distinct honour from that day. When the rumour spread that the Prophet ﷺ had been killed, a lie the enemy shouted to break Muslim morale, Ka'b was the first to catch sight of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ still alive, and he raised the glad tidings so the believers would take heart. Then he did something almost beyond belief. He swapped his own armour with the Prophet ﷺ, drawing the enemy onto himself, and pulled a group of fighters to the far side of the field so the Messenger of Allah ﷺ could be shielded. A man who had offered his own body as a decoy to save the Prophet ﷺ was a man whose record seemed beyond reproach.

The Prophet ﷺ valued him in quieter ways too. He once told Ka'b that Allah had not forgotten certain words of his poetry, for Allah does not forget any good a person does, and had Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) recite the verse back to Ka'b from memory: that whoever imagines he can defeat the One who defeats all will himself be defeated. A poem composed years earlier, recorded in the heavens as a good deed, a glimpse of how the smallest sincere act for Allah is never lost. So this was the standing of Ka'b ibn Malik: an early believer, a wounded veteran, a praised poet. And it is precisely this height that makes what happened next so heavy. The fall is only as far as the climb was high.

The army that left without him

Tabuk was unlike anything the believers had faced. The Romans had killed an envoy of the Prophet ﷺ, word came that a vast army was massing, and so the Prophet ﷺ announced the expedition openly. It was high summer, the heat brutal, the road across waterless land, the enemy far larger than the force the Muslims could muster. They called it the army of hardship.

And the companions answered. Uthman ibn Affan (may Allah be pleased with him) financed the army so generously that the Prophet ﷺ declared nothing Uthman did after that day could ever harm him. Around twenty thousand companions gathered, leaving behind their homes and harvests to march into the desert with barely enough water. The hypocrites, by contrast, stood exposed at last. They tried to discourage people, saying do not march out in the heat, and they mocked the rich who gave much as show-offs and the poor who gave little as beneath Allah's notice. Of them Allah revealed:

It is they who criticize the believers who give freely and those who can only give a little with great effort: they scoff at such people, but it is God who scoffs at them- a painful punishment awaits them.

QUR'AN 9:79

So the people sorted themselves. There were the eager who came forward without hesitation. There were the sincere ones excused by poverty or ill health, who wept because they could not go. There were the hypocrites who made false excuses. And then there were three men who fit none of these categories, three genuine believers of standing, who had no real excuse and simply fell behind. One of them was Ka'b ibn Malik.

Ka'b told the story against himself with a brutal honesty that is hard to read. He had spent his whole life poor, sometimes among the homeless of Madinah, and Tabuk arrived in the one season of ease he had ever known. For the first time he owned two riding camels at once, and his garden was ripe, the fruit heavy, the shade long and inviting. So when the Prophet ﷺ said be ready, be ready, Ka'b told himself he was good at preparing quickly and would do it when the time came. He went out each morning meaning to equip himself and came back having done nothing. Then one morning he rose and the Prophet ﷺ was gone, the army was gone, and the road out of Madinah was empty.

He walked through the city in shock. The only men left, he realised, were the obvious hypocrites and those excused for their incapacity. He told himself he would set out and catch the army, and then he did not. This is the moment, forty years later, where the old blind man paused and said simply: I wish I had done it. But Allah, he said, decreed otherwise for me.

Nothing but the truth

Out in Tabuk, the Prophet ﷺ looked around and asked, what did Ka'b ibn Malik do? A man from his clan answered that the beauty of his gardens and his new wealth had held him back. But Mu'adh ibn Jabal (may Allah be pleased with him) rebuked him, saying that was an evil thing to say, and that by Allah they knew only good of Ka'b. Notice that when Ka'b told the story, he named Mu'adh, who defended him, but concealed the name of the man who spoke against him. Even in recounting his own humiliation, he would not expose another.

The Prophet ﷺ said nothing, for at that moment a figure appeared in the distance, a man in white moving through the shimmer of the desert heat. Be Abu Khaythama, the Prophet ﷺ said. And it was Abu Khaythama (may Allah be pleased with him), chasing the army on his own to join the Prophet ﷺ. Ka'b told this part with longing, because he too could have followed and caught up and been counted among them. Procrastination had robbed him of it.

When the army returned from Tabuk, the battle never having taken place, Ka'b had a decision to make. Others urged him to invent an excuse, but as the Prophet ﷺ drew near, every false plan emptied out of him and he reached a single conclusion: nothing would save him except the truth. As was his habit on returning from travel, the Prophet ﷺ went first to the mosque, prayed two units, and sat with the people. The stragglers came to him, some eighty men, swearing oaths and offering excuses one after another. The Prophet ﷺ accepted what they said at face value, sought forgiveness for them, and left their hidden intentions to Allah.

Then it was Ka'b's turn. He came forward, and the Prophet ﷺ smiled at him, but it was the smile of a man who is angry. Not you, the smile seemed to say. The Prophet ﷺ asked, what kept you back? Did you not buy your mount? And Ka'b said: O Messenger of Allah, if I were sitting before anyone else, I could talk my way out of his anger, for I am a man given to argument. But if I tell you something false to please you today, Allah will soon make you displeased with me, and if I tell you the truth and you are angry, I hope for a good outcome from Allah. By Allah, I had no excuse. I was never stronger or better provided than when I stayed behind. The Prophet ﷺ said: as for this one, he has told the truth. Get up and wait until Allah decides about you.

Fifty nights of silence

What followed was the hardest trial of Ka'b's life. The Prophet ﷺ forbade the believers to speak to the three men who had told the truth: Ka'b, Murarah ibn ar-Rabi', and Hilal ibn Umayya. This was not cruelty. It was Allah's affair, suspended until the heavens spoke, and the believers obeyed. The world Ka'b knew turned to stone around him. People he had prayed beside, fought beside, would not return his greeting. His two companions, both older, shut themselves in their homes and wept. Ka'b, the youngest and strongest, forced himself to keep going out, to pray and walk through the market while no one said a word to him. He would greet the Prophet ﷺ after prayer and watch his lips, wondering whether they had moved in reply, and whenever he stole a glance, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ would look away.

The cruellest moment came at the garden wall of his own cousin, Abu Qatadah (may Allah be pleased with him), the man Ka'b loved most. Ka'b climbed the wall and greeted him, and Abu Qatadah said nothing. Abu Qatadah, I ask you by Allah, Ka'b said,

do you not know that I love Allah and His Messenger? His cousin was silent. He asked again, and again, until at last Abu Qatadah said only, Allah and His Messenger know best. And Ka'b's eyes overflowed, and he climbed back down and left.

Then came the temptation. A stranger arrived with a letter from the king of the Christian Arabs, and it said: we have heard that your companion is mistreating you, and Allah has not made you to be humiliated, so come to us and we will honour you. Here was an escape from the pain, dignity and belonging at the price of his faith. Ka'b knew it at once for what it was. This too, he said, is part of the trial. And he carried the letter to the oven and burned it.

Even his household was taken from him. The three were told to keep away from their wives, and though the elderly Hilal was allowed his wife to care for him, Ka'b, being young, would not even ask for the same, but sent his wife to her family and waited.

Fifty nights passed like this. The earth, for all its vastness, had closed in on him exactly as Allah would soon describe. He had prayed the dawn prayer and was sitting on the roof of his house, his soul narrowed to almost nothing, when a voice carried from the top of a hill, crying with all its strength: Ka'b ibn Malik, rejoice! He fell down in prostration, for he knew that relief had come from Allah. The Prophet ﷺ had announced that Allah accepted their repentance, and the people scattered to be the first to bring Ka'b the news. The first to reach him brought such joy that Ka'b stripped off his own garment and gave it to the man as a gift.

When he entered the mosque, Talhah ibn Ubaydillah (may Allah be pleased with him) rose and hurried across to embrace him, and Ka'b said he would never forget it as long as he lived. The Prophet ﷺ, whose face when glad shone like a piece of the

moon, said to him: rejoice in the best day you have seen since the day your mother gave birth to you. Ka'b asked, is this from you, or from Allah? And the Prophet ﷺ answered: rather, it is from Allah. Allah revealed of him and his two companions:

And to the three men who stayed behind: when the earth, for all its spaciousness, closed in around them, when their very souls closed in around them, when they realized that the only refuge from God was with Him, He turned to them in mercy in order for them to return [to Him]. God is the Ever Relenting, the Most Merciful.

QUR'AN 9:118

Overflowing with gratitude, Ka'b offered to give away all his wealth as charity, the very wealth that had distracted him. But the Prophet ﷺ did not exploit the moment and told him to keep some of it, for that was better for him. And Ka'b made a vow for the rest of his life: because the truth had saved him, he would never speak anything but the truth as long as he lived. A lie, he said, would have ruined him as the liars were ruined. For all those who had offered excuses and been accepted at face value were exposed by Allah as hypocrites, while the three who told the truth were named, in the verse that immediately follows, among the truthful:

You who believe, be mindful of God: stand with those who are true.

QUR'AN 9:119

Ka'b lived a long and peaceful life after that, his name forever joined to one thing: returning to Allah. He grew old and blind, led to the mosque by his son, his heart keeping faith to the end with

the people who had brought him to the truth and with the One who had saved him by it.

What Ka'b's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read Ka'b's story as a tale of one man's slip and recovery, admiring his honesty the way we admire a fine thing on a shelf. But his life is not on a shelf. It is a question put directly to our own iman, sharper than it first appears.

The first thing his life asks is whether we tell Allah the truth about ourselves. Ka'b stood before the one man most worth impressing, with every skill to talk his way out, surrounded by eighty men who had just done exactly that, and he chose the truth knowing it would hurt. He reasoned that a lie might buy the Prophet's pleasure for a day but would earn Allah's anger, while the truth might cost him for a season and still leave his affair with the Most Merciful. That is the calculation of real faith: to fear Allah more than the consequences of honesty, to refuse to dress up our sins in excuses even in the privacy of our own hearts. When you next reach for a justification, for a missed prayer, a broken promise, a duty you let slide, ask whether you are being a Ka'b or one of the eighty. Allah already knows the truth. The only question is whether you will say it.

The second thing his life asks is how we treat the comfortable little life that Allah gives us. Ka'b did not fall through some great wickedness. He fell through a ripe garden and two camels and the soft voice that says you have time. His distraction was small and ordinary, and that is exactly why it should frighten us, because ours are too. The same procrastination that kept him from the army keeps us from the dawn prayer and the good we always intend to do tomorrow. He spent forty years still grieving a single morning of delay. Let his regret spare us our own. The

good you intend today, do today, for Allah, before the army leaves without you.

And the third thing, the part that should lift the heart, is the promise underneath the whole story. Ka'b endured fifty nights in which the earth itself seemed to suffocate him, abandoned by everyone he loved, tempted with honour by the enemies of his faith, and through all of it he held on to Allah and burned the letter that offered him a way out. Then Allah turned to him, named him in a verse to be recited until the end of time, and the Prophet ﷺ told him this was the best day of his life. Allah does not abandon the one who clings to Him in the dark, and patience with His decree is never wasted. When you cannot see a single way forward, the only refuge from Allah is with Allah, and to that refuge He turns back to whoever turns back to Him.

So carry one thing from Ka'b into your ordinary days. Tell Allah the honest truth about a sin you have been excusing, and stop excusing it. Do one delayed good deed now, for His sake. And when hardship closes the earth around you, hold steady and turn to Him alone, the way Ka'b did on that rooftop, until the one who calls your name calls it with glad tidings. May Allah be pleased with Ka'b ibn Malik, count us among the truthful, and accept our repentance as He accepted his.

This chapter follows the account of Ka'b ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (9:79, 9:118, 9:119). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abdullah ibn Rawahah

The Warrior Poet

There is a picture we carry of the poet, and it is a quiet one. A man on the edges of things, watching, choosing his words, never in the thick of the fight. Abdullah ibn Rawahah (may Allah be pleased with him) breaks that picture in half. He was a poet, the first poet of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and he was also a warrior in the front line of the battlefield, chanting his verses aloud as the swords came down. He did not sing from the sidelines. He sang while leading men into death, and on the day his own death came, he stood over himself and commanded his own soul to advance.

Of the three poets who defended the Prophet ﷺ with their words, his virtues are the most firmly established on the tongue of the Prophet ﷺ himself. He combined what almost no one combined: poetry and battle, eloquence and worship, a sharp wit and a soft, fearful heart. To meet him is to meet a man who gave every part of himself to Allah, and held nothing back.

A name known before the man

He was from the tribe of Khazraj, one of the Ansar of Madinah. His father had passed away before Islam. His mother, and his sister Amrah, both accepted Islam alongside him, so that faith ran through the household and not through him alone. His sister married, and through her came his maternal nephew Nu'man ibn

Bashir, a famous companion who would later preserve much of what we know of Abdullah, including his poetry. He had no children that we know of. What he left behind was not descendants. It was a legacy carried on other men's tongues.

Before Islam, he was among the few of the Ansar who were highly literate, deeply read, and famously eloquent. His poetry from the days of ignorance was good enough that the Prophet ﷺ already knew of it before the two ever met, for his verses were quoted in gatherings the Prophet ﷺ sat in. The scholars later pointed to this as proof that poetry and art which carries good meaning, and undermines nothing of the faith, is permitted, because the Prophet ﷺ continued to enjoy Abdullah's pre-Islamic verse so long as nothing obscene came through it.

He was also famous for his mind. He was quick. Put a handful of something before him in the marketplace and he could tell you its weight without lifting it. Look at a stranger and he could read their lineage, their traits, the country they came from, who their siblings might be. He was not a man easily impressed, and not a man easily deceived. So there was a real curiosity in the air over what such a man would say when he finally saw the Prophet ﷺ for the first time.

The man who knew at a glance

He looked at the Prophet ﷺ, and the words that came out of him were a poem. Had there been no clear signs at all, no revelation, no Qur'an, no miracle, he said, your appearance alone, your essence, the way you carried yourself, the way you answered the moment it was put to you, would have told us you were a recipient of divine revelation. I looked at him, and I knew he was a prophet.

It is a striking thing to set his conversion beside the others of his time. The chief rabbi of Madinah read the descriptions in the Torah, looked, and said: that is him. Another poet would look and know. And this man, who judged people for a living, who read faces and weighed truth from falsehood by sheer intelligence, looked and said the same: that is him. From wholly different doors, by wholly different keys, each one arrived at the same certainty. Abdullah accepted Islam at once, with no hesitation at all.

He did more than accept it. He went to Makkah and was among the seventy-three of the Ansar who took the pledge with the Prophet ﷺ before the migration to Madinah had even happened. He was one of the representatives of his people in that oath. And when he returned to Madinah, he began calling others to Islam before the Prophet ﷺ had even arrived. The first person he turned to was his closest friend, his brother for life, the man he had grown up beside and loved more than blood.

The trustee with the sharp tongue

He had a strong personality and no patience for pretence. Straightforward, plain, no nonsense. And so he became the first man to stand up to the leader of the hypocrites of Madinah, a man who had been on the very edge of being crowned king of the city before Islam came and undid his plans.

The scene was a mixed gathering: Muslims, hypocrites, and some of the Jews of Madinah sitting together. The Prophet ﷺ rode close to invite them, and the would-be king insulted him, telling him to keep his distance, that his mount troubled them, that they had no interest in what he had to say. It was Abdullah who stood and answered him: no, we are very interested. Come to us. Tell us what you have to say. A scuffle broke out among the

men around them, and afterward the Prophet ﷺ understood why this one man hated him so deeply. His crown had already been in the making. Islam had taken his throne before he ever sat on it.

Because he was so trustworthy, the Prophet ﷺ made Abdullah one of his trustees, sending him to the various tribes inside Madinah as his right hand, including to the Jewish tribes. And because he was so sharp, the Prophet ﷺ put his mind to use. On the day Khaybar was opened, it is authentically narrated that the Prophet ﷺ sent Abdullah to estimate the date palms, to look at the trees and determine, by sight alone, what share of the fruit belonged to the Muslims and what remained for the people of Khaybar. He stood before them and told them plainly that he had made the division fair between the two sides, and he was. The same gift that had once impressed merchants in a marketplace now served justice. And it was Abdullah, too, whom the Prophet ﷺ sent ahead from Badr to announce the great victory to the people of Madinah, which he did in his own poetic way.

The poem in the trench

The Prophet ﷺ used to quote Abdullah's poetry so often that the scholars say we do not know of anyone else whose words the Prophet ﷺ would repeat the way he repeated his. One line he loved said that news comes to you from where you least expect it, from people you never paved the way for. He would say it around the house, in different settings, and it stayed with those who heard him.

But the most famous of his verses was not recited in a quiet room. It was sung in the trench. When the enemy armies marched on Madinah, the Muslims dug a great ditch around the city, racing against time, starving, knowing that a single breach anywhere along the line would let a force through that could

destroy them all. The Prophet ﷺ saw how exhausted and frightened the people were. He himself was hungry. And he began to lift his voice with Abdullah's words, a poem that was also a prayer:

Were it not for You we would never have been guided, nor given charity, nor prayed. So send down upon us calmness, and make our feet firm if we meet the enemy. Our foes have transgressed against us, and if they seek to stir up trial, we will not flee, we will hold our ground.

The narrator says the Prophet ﷺ recited it, and a few men began to say it with him, and then he raised his voice, and more joined, until the whole company was chanting it together as they dug. Picture it: a trench, a siege, an army on the far side too large to count, and the believers digging through their hunger with a poem on every tongue. It was not only morale. It was a supplication and an affirmation at once, asking Allah for steadiness, declaring that they belonged to Him, that whatever came, they would not run. And by Allah's help, they held.

That was one face of war poetry. The other face was turned toward the enemy. When the Muslims entered Makkah for the delayed pilgrimage agreed at Hdaybiyah, the year the Quraysh had hoped to humble them by making them wait, Abdullah walked in among the pilgrims and shot the disbelievers with verse after verse, meeting Abu Sufyan's eye and warning them that they were no longer feared. Someone told him to be quiet, that this was the sanctuary of Allah and the presence of His Messenger. But the Prophet ﷺ said to let him continue, that his words struck them harder than arrows. There was a wisdom in it. These were the very people who had driven the Muslims out and now sought a little joy in delaying their worship. The Prophet ﷺ

found a role for the man and his gift, and did not cut him down for it. Abdullah's whole life shows a leader who knew when a believer's strength was the right thing in the right place.

The man who never slipped

What makes him a wonder to read about is this: of the three poets, he is the only one who never had a single slip with the Prophet ﷺ. No moment of his poetry going too far against the faith, no incident of displeasing the Prophet ﷺ, nothing. His piety, his fear of Allah, his skill in war, the purity of his worship, all of it held. The Prophet ﷺ put him in charge of Madinah at times, kept him near in battle, and placed him over more than thirty expeditions, leading them and chanting his verse as he led. The scholars say that alone, a warrior and a poet without a single fault recorded against him, puts him in a league of his own.

The one time the Prophet ﷺ admonished him, it was not for a sin at all. Abdullah had sent his battalion ahead on a Friday and stayed behind to pray with the Prophet ﷺ, meaning to catch up after. When the Prophet ﷺ asked him why he was still there, he said he had wanted the reward of praying alongside him. The Prophet ﷺ told him that if he had the entire world in gold he would not reach the reward of those who had gone out early. So go with them. Even his mistakes were made out of love for worship.

And the worship is the heart of him. His most famous saying was an invitation he would offer when he met one of the companions. Come, he would say, let us believe for an hour. Let us go worship Allah for an hour. He meant: come walk with me, let us remember Allah together, let us increase our faith. Once a man misunderstood and took offense, thinking he was being told to believe for one hour and abandon faith the rest of the day, and he

complained to the Prophet ﷺ. The Prophet ﷺ smiled and explained, and then said something about the man who had spoken those words: he loves the gatherings the angels boast about. May Allah make this one of them.

A heart that feared the fire

For all his strength, his heart was tender and afraid before Allah. Abu Dharr said there were days so hot a man would shield his face with his hands, and the only two people fasting would be the Prophet ﷺ and Abdullah ibn Rawahah. He pushed himself that far into worship.

His wife once found him weeping, and began to weep herself. He asked her why. She said, because you are crying. He told her he had just understood that he was going to be touched by the Fire, for he had heard the words of Allah:

but every single one of you will approach it, a decree from your Lord which must be fulfilled. We shall save the devout and leave the evildoers there on their knees.

QUR'AN 19:71-72

He had heard that every soul must pass over it, and though Allah comforts the believers that He will save them, Abdullah feared it might be him. And when he heard the verses about the poets, that they are followed by those who go astray, he wept and said: Allah knows I am one of those poets. Then came the rest of the verse, which set him apart from the poets it warned against:

only those who are lost in error follow the poets. Do you not see how they rove aimlessly in every valley; how they say what they do not do? Not so those [poets] who believe, do good deeds, remember God often, and defend

themselves after they have been wronged. The evildoers will find out what they will return to.

QUR'AN 26:224-227

He did not hear a verse about wicked poets and assume it spoke of someone else. He heard it and trembled that it might be about him, and Allah comforted him in the very next breath. That is how a believing heart receives the Qur'an: not pointing the warning outward, but turning it inward first.

Resisting Paradise at Mu'tah

His death came at the Battle of Mu'tah, one of the hardest battles the Muslims faced in the time of the Prophet ﷺ. After the Prophet's envoy was killed on the Roman frontier, he sent three thousand men, and the Byzantines gathered an army said to number two hundred thousand to meet them. The Prophet ﷺ had named the order of command: first Zayd ibn Harithah, then Ja'far, then Abdullah ibn Rawahah. To be the third named, after the beloved Zayd and the beloved cousin Ja'far, was itself a station of honor.

Zayd was killed, and many Muslims with him. Ja'far took the banner and was killed. And through all of it Abdullah was chanting, urging the men forward, advance, advance. Then they told him the leadership had come to him, and for a moment he hesitated, and his soul drew back from the death in front of it. So he turned and spoke to his own soul. Do I see you resisting Paradise, he said. I swear by Allah, you will enter it, willingly or I will drag you into it. Then he took the banner and went forward, and he too was martyred.

When the news reached Madinah, the Prophet ﷺ was sitting in the mosque, and he wept at the mention of each name in turn,

Zayd, then Ja'far, then Abdullah, three men so beloved taken in a single day. He rose to the pulpit weeping to announce it. The companions later said the martyrs of Mu'tah were upon thrones of gold in Paradise for what they had endured. His grave lies in Jordan, on the ground where he fell.

His wife later remarried, and her second husband, in awe of the man who had come before him, asked her to tell him everything: what was Abdullah like at home, what was his worship like. She said the thing she remembered most was simple and constant. He never entered the house without praying two units of prayer, and never left it without praying two units of prayer, and he never once broke that habit. A warrior, a poet, a trustee, a leader of armies, and what his wife remembered was the two quiet prayers at the threshold of his own door.

What Abdullah's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read a life like his and feel only the distance of it. A poet on the front line, a man fasting in heat that drove others to cover their faces, a soul commanded into Paradise by its own owner. Set that high on a shelf and it asks nothing of us. But his life is not a monument. It is a question put to our own iman.

He turned the warning inward. When he heard the verse about poets who go astray, he did not think of other poets. He thought, that might be me, and he wept. This is one of the surest signs of living faith, and one of the easiest to lose. We read the Qur'an's warnings and quietly assume they describe someone else, some worse person, some other crowd. He did the opposite. Take that into your own reading. When you meet a warning from Allah, ask first whether it could be about you, and let it move you to fear

Him and return to Him, the way it moved a man whom the Prophet ﷺ loved.

He gave every part of himself, and kept the small things constant. The two units of prayer at the door cost him almost nothing, a minute, twice, every time he passed the threshold of his home. But he never broke them, not once, across a life of battles and burdens. That is the kind of worship still open to every one of us. Not the heroics of Mu'tah, which Allah may never ask of you, but the quiet, unbroken habit done for His sake alone: a short prayer kept faithfully, a remembrance never abandoned, a private devotion no one else will ever see. His wife remembered it because he did it for Allah and not for anyone watching, and that is the heart of sincerity. Choose one small act of worship and never let it go, for His sake.

And he commanded his own soul. At Mu'tah, when his soul drew back from death, he did not follow it. He turned and told it where to go: into the obedience of Allah, willingly or by force. Most of us are led by our souls; he led his. Your hardships will rarely look like a battlefield. They will look like a heart that does not want to pray, a self that wants to complain of Allah's decree, a nafs that pulls back from the harder, better thing. Speak to it as he did. Tell it that what lies ahead, through the difficulty, is Paradise, and that you will go forward whether it wants to or not. That is courage of a kind anyone can practice today, in the small refusals of an ordinary life.

His whole story comes down to a man who held nothing back from his Lord, in war and at home, in his loud poetry and his quiet tears. May Allah be pleased with Abdullah ibn Rawahah, grant us a share of his fear and his sincerity, make us among those who turn the Qur'an's warnings upon ourselves and keep our small

worship faithful for His sake alone, and gather us with the warrior poet upon the thrones of gold.

This chapter follows the account of Abdullah ibn Rawahah (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (19:71-72, 26:224-227). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abu Darda

The Scholar of the Companions

There is a man who walked into the mosque of Damascus and was followed through it the way a king is followed. One person asked him a question of law, another a question of hadith, another about money, another about poetry, and he answered each of them as he walked. He had no throne and no guard. He had only knowledge, and in that age knowledge was enough to make a crowd part around a single man.

His name was Abu Darda, and the strange thing, the thing worth sitting with, is that he was the last of the great Ansar to accept Islam, and he became the most learned of them all. The companion who came late became the one the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ called the wise man of his nation. To understand how that happened, you have to meet him first as a man kneeling before an idol in his own home.

The man who loved his idol

His real name was Uwaymir, the son of Amir, of the tribe of al-Khazraj, from the clan of Banu al-Harith. He was wealthy, with businesses scattered across Yathrib, and he was beloved by his people, known for his fine clothes and his handsome appearance. He was also, by temperament, a man who stayed out of fights. While the tribes of his city tore at each other in the wars before Islam, he kept to the side. He was not a politician and

not a partisan. He simply wanted to be left to his trade and his peace.

And to his idol. This is where Abu Darda (may Allah be pleased with him) was unusual. The chiefs of Makkah who clung to their idols rarely believed in them. They saw the idols as instruments of power, and they said so openly among themselves. Abu Darda was not like that. He was a sincere worshipper of a thing that could not hear him. He kept an idol in his house and lavished it with devotion. He dressed it in the best garments he owned. He perfumed it with the most expensive perfume he had. He gave it long hours of his attention. There was, the scholars say, already something different about him, a depth of sincerity that had simply been poured into the wrong vessel.

His closest friend was Abdullah ibn Rawahah (may Allah be pleased with him), and the two were nearer than brothers of blood. They lived together at times, traveled together, shared from one another's wealth. When Abdullah was among the very first of Madinah to take the pledge with the Prophet ﷺ at al-Aqabah, he came back and told his friend everything. Abu Darda's answer was warm and entirely closed: good for you, but I am happy with my religion. You go your way. He even supported Abdullah in his new faith. When the Muslims came back from Badr, it was Abu Darda, still a worshipper of his idol, who went out anxiously asking the returning men whether Abdullah had survived.

But Abdullah ibn Rawahah was running out of patience watching his dearest friend kneel before a carved thing while the truth stood plainly in front of him.

The broken idol

One day Abdullah came to Abu Darda's house while the master was out at his business. Umm Darda, Abu Darda's wife, opened the door and let him in. He walked to the idol and began to break it, saying as he struck it, everything that is worshipped besides Allah is false. Umm Darda screamed at him. He finished, said his goodbye, and left.

Abu Darda came home to find his wife weeping before the shattered remains. What happened, he asked. Your brother Abdullah came, she said, and he broke it, and then he left. And Abu Darda turned to the wreckage of the god he had perfumed and clothed and spoke to it. Woe to you. Why did you not stop him? Could you not defend yourself?

His wife answered with a sentence that broke something open in him. If it could protect or benefit anyone, she said, it would have protected and benefited itself.

He stood with that for a long moment. Then he asked her to draw water. He washed himself, put on his best clothes, and walked out to find the Prophet ﷺ and accept Islam.

When he arrived, the Prophet ﷺ was sitting with Abdullah ibn Rawahah, who saw his friend approaching and grew uneasy. Messenger of Allah, he said, this is Abu Darda, and I do not think he comes except to settle accounts with me over his idol. The Prophet ﷺ answered, no, he comes only to accept Islam. My Lord has promised me that Abu Darda would become a Muslim.

It was a private promise from Allah to His Messenger ﷺ about one specific man, a wealthy idol-worshipper who had waited longer than all his people, that one day his heart would turn. And it turned. Years later Abu Darda would laugh with Abdullah about those days, marveling that he had ever bowed to such a thing. It is a quiet warning folded into a happy story: the brightest and the

most sincere can be carried far in the wrong direction, and you should be slow to write anyone off, and slower to mock what they love, until faith has had its chance to reach them.

Catching up

He was the last of the major Ansar to believe, and from the moment he believed he ran. He set himself to memorizing the Qur'an and became one of the very few who held all of it in his chest during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ, reciting it back to him directly. He took the front row in every prayer. He sat close to the Prophet ﷺ in every gathering. He went to the other companions and asked them, again and again, what he had missed during all those years he had spent on his trade and his idol, and what he had missed was a great deal, and he meant to recover every bit of it.

The change in him was not measured. At Uhud, when most of the army broke and fled and only a handful stayed close to the Prophet ﷺ, Abu Darda was among those who stayed. The image of him in that battle is the image of a man who would not stop. He fought with his sword until he lost it, then threw arrows until they ran out, then picked up stones and threw stones, taking wound after wound, putting his own body between the Prophet ﷺ and those who wanted to kill him. The Prophet ﷺ looked at him and asked who that was, and was told it was Abu Darda, and he said, what an excellent horseman Uwaymir is. In another narration he said, the wise man of my nation is Uwaymir.

Hold that beside another name. Abu Jahl, the great enemy, had once been called Abu al-Hakam, the father of wisdom, and his arrogance turned him into the most despised figure in this religion's history. And here was a man who had clung to his idol and arrived last of all, now called by the Prophet ﷺ the wise one,

al-Hakim, of the whole ummah. You truly never know where faith will fall, or how it will rewrite the end of a life.

A heart in one place

There came a point when Abu Darda had to make a choice that not every companion made. He told it on himself with rare honesty. I was a well-known merchant before the Prophet was sent, he said. When Islam came, I tried to combine my trade with my worship, and I could not. So I gave up the trade and kept the worship.

He was not boasting. The greater achievement, the scholars note, belonged to companions like Abu Bakr and Abd al-Rahman ibn Awf, who kept their wealth and their worship both and let neither pull them from Allah. Abu Darda knew that. He was confessing a limit in himself: he could not hold both without one stealing his heart from the other. He had a saying that names the danger exactly. I seek refuge in Allah, he said, from a scattered heart. And when they asked him what a scattered heart was, he said, it is that Allah gave me a business in every valley, so my mind is here with this investment and there with that one and somewhere else with a third. He could not gather himself while his wealth was strewn across the world, so he sold it off and gathered himself before Allah.

His wife described what was left of him to Salman al-Farsi when Salman came to stay: your brother Abu Darda has no need of this world. He has lost all interest in it. He became the ascetic of the Ansar, the man whose every recorded saying reads like a sermon, deep and poetic, turning always on the smallness of this life against the size of the next.

What he learned, he lived

The mark of Abu Darda was not that he could recite knowledge but that he refused to let it stay on his tongue. He pressed the Prophet ﷺ constantly on how a person rises in the sight of Allah, and so the hadith he carries cluster around exactly the things he wanted for himself: good character, sincere worship, the seeking of knowledge.

He is the one who narrates that nothing is heavier on the scale on the Day of Judgment than good character. And his wife saw what that hadith looked like inside their own house at night. She said that Abu Darda stood one night in prayer and wept, repeating one supplication: O Allah, You have made my outward form beautiful, so make my character beautiful. He said it until dawn. She asked him, did you find nothing to ask for all night but good character? He told her that a servant keeps working on his character until it carries him into Paradise, and that a Muslim is forgiven even while he sleeps. How, she asked, is a sleeping man forgiven? Because, he said, if you show people good character, one of them will rise in the night and pray for you, and you will be forgiven while you rest.

He lived that too. Umm Darda said her husband had three hundred and sixty friends he loved for the sake of Allah, and that he prayed for every one of them by name each night, and in one report prayed for their parents as well. She asked him why. Because the Prophet ﷺ taught that when you pray for your brother in his absence, an angel says, and for you the same. What, he asked her, is better for me than the angels praying for me through the night while I pray for them? Ask yourself how many people you have prayed for in the dark, by name, who will never know you did it.

He took the hadith that there is no charity greater than reconciling people, and he went looking for broken relationships to mend, urging the wrongdoer to apologize and the wronged to forgive. There is a report of a man whose tooth had been knocked out in a fight, who refused to forgive because of how it left him looking, and of Abu Darda going to his house and pleading with him until he forgave for the sake of Allah. And when he heard the verse about the man dragged to the Fire, the words came down and he carried them straight home and turned them into a daily habit. Allah described that man:

he would not believe in Almighty God, he never encouraged feeding the hungry,

QUR'AN 69:33-34

Abu Darda heard it and said to his wife, we already have the first part, faith in Almighty God. So from now on we will feed a poor person every single day, so that we never fall into the second. And from that day, the two of them fed someone in need every day for the rest of his life. This is what it means to be a scholar: not to collect the words, but to be changed by them the moment they arrive.

The fear of the learned man, and the work of his nights

For all his closeness to Allah, the thing Abu Darda feared most was hypocrisy. It unsettled his own students to see it. One of them came upon him in his place of prayer, bearing witness to the oneness of Allah and then asking Allah to protect him from being a hypocrite, and the student said, may Allah forgive you, Abu Darda, what have you to do with hypocrisy? And Abu Darda answered, who can feel safe? I have seen people reach a station with Allah and then go back on their word to Him. In another

narration he said the thing he dreaded was that Allah would gather all of creation and ask him, Uwaymir, what did you do with what you knew? A man could combine that nearness and that fear in one heart. If people like this never grew complacent, what excuse have we?

His worship had a quiet center that is easy to overlook. When they asked what his most constant act of devotion was, the answer was not the night prayer or the fasting, though he did both. It was sitting in silence to contemplate and reflect. He used to say that an hour of reflection was better than a night of prayer. That is a heavy thing to hear from one of the most learned of all the companions: that there is no substitute for taking yourself out of the noise to sit and think, with Allah as the focus of the thinking. Most of us complain that we feel nothing in our worship and no pull toward Allah, and we have never once given Him ten quiet minutes with the phone away.

When the people of greater Syria needed teachers, Abu Darda was sent among a handful chosen to instruct them in the Qur'an and in the lawful and the forbidden, and he settled in Damascus and Hims. There he built what may be the first organized system for teaching the Qur'an in Islam. In the mosque of Damascus he ran two hundred study circles. Each circle had a leader he himself had trained, and each leader taught the rest. Abu Darda would lead the prayer, then sit and remember Allah, then read his own portion, then take his place in a corner of the mosque and watch over all two hundred circles at once, the recitation of the whole city rising around him, and the students would come to be tested by him one circle at a time. When you recite the Qur'an today, the chain of that recitation can run back through a corner of that mosque, and from there to Madinah, and to the Prophet ﷺ himself.

He kept his joy near the surface. His wife noticed that he never narrated a single hadith of the Prophet ﷺ without smiling, and she warned him that people would think something was wrong with him. He said, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ never narrated to us except that he was smiling, and so I cannot do otherwise. And when he was made governor and judge of Damascus and his students came to congratulate him, he was distressed, and asked them, do you congratulate me over a trust that Allah throws people into the Fire over? He took the appointment, but he never let the rank touch him. When the caliph wrote asking why a governor with a monthly allowance owned so little, Abu Darda answered that the Prophet ﷺ had warned them the world would open up and that a believer should take from it no more than a traveler takes for the road. He arranged it so that everything he owned could fit on a single camel, and anything beyond that he did not want, for the one who travels light, he said, arrives sooner.

What Abu Darda's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel small, to file Abu Darda away as a giant we could never approach. But the first lesson of his life argues against exactly that. He came last. The whole of the Ansar believed before him, and he spent years on the wrong side of the door, and none of it kept him from becoming the most learned of them all. His life is a standing refusal of the excuse that you have started too late, fallen too far behind, wasted too many years to bother now. He did not look back at the time he had lost. He looked forward and ran. Whatever years you think you have squandered on something that could not hear you, the door he walked through is still open.

The heart of what he asks of us is this. He had a phrase for the sickness of his own soul: the scattered heart, pulled in a hundred directions, a piece of it in every valley where he had money or a worry or a want. We know that heart intimately. Ours is scattered not across caravans but across screens and the endless small anxieties of a divided attention, and we wonder why we feel nothing when we pray. Abu Darda's answer was costly and clear. He gathered his heart by removing what was scattering it. You may not need to sell a business, but his life asks you to find the one or two things that have stolen the center of your attention from Allah and to be honest enough, as he was, to let them go. Then sit, as he sat, in silence, and reflect, and let Allah be the thing your heart finally rests on.

And notice what he did with everything he learned. He did not let a single teaching die as information. He heard that good character is heaviest on the scale, and he wept through a night begging Allah to beautify his. He heard that praying for an absent brother brings the angels to pray for you, and he carried three hundred and sixty names into the dark every night. He heard one verse about feeding the hungry and fed someone every day until he died. This is the test for us. We have read more than he ever heard recited, and the question is whether any of it has changed a single day of our lives. Take one thing you already know to be true and act on it today, for Allah, before the knowledge cools: feed someone, mend a broken tie, pray quietly by name for a person who will never find out.

Hold, too, what frightened him. A man that close to Allah still asked, who can feel safe, and still trembled at being asked one day what he did with what he knew. That fear was not despair. It sat beside a smile he could not suppress whenever he spoke of the Prophet ﷺ. This is the balance of a believing heart, hope and

fear together, near to Allah and never presuming upon Him. If the wise man of the ummah refused to feel secure, then our own ease about ourselves is the thing most worth examining.

His was a life so beautifully lived that when he lay dying, no one came forward with a debt unpaid or a grievance unsettled, a thing almost unheard of for a man who had been a judge and a governor. He died in complete tranquility, and his wife, who had watched him pray through so many nights, asked him to seek her hand from Allah in Paradise as he had once sought it from her father in this world, and he accepted. After he was gone she turned down a marriage to one of the most powerful men alive, saying she was already promised to Abu Darda in the Garden. He had asked Allah every night for good character, and Allah had granted it so fully that it followed him past the grave and held his wife's heart even after death. May Allah be pleased with Abu Darda, gather our scattered hearts as He gathered his, and let what little we know become, by His mercy, something we actually live.

This chapter follows the account of Abu Darda (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (69:33-34). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Salman al-Farsi

The Son of Islam

There is a way of telling the story of Salman al-Farsi (may Allah be pleased with him) that ends too soon. It begins in Persia, in a house where a boy tended a sacred fire, and follows him through one religion after another, from monastery to monastery, sold from owner to owner, until at last he reaches Madinah and stands before the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and believes. There the telling usually stops, as if the long search were the whole of the man. But the search was only the beginning. What came after, the years among the companions, the silence, the worship, the strange and beautiful return to the very empire that had sold him into slavery, is the part that tells you who he truly became.

Ibn al-Qayyim, centuries later, wrote a meditation on him in his book *al-Fawa'id* that reads less like history than like a question pressed against the chest. He set Salman beside the great names of Makkah. Abu Talib, the uncle who sheltered the Prophet ﷺ with his own body and yet turned away from the message, drowns, in Ibn al-Qayyim's image, in a sea of ruin. And there, on the safe shore, stands Salman, a man who came from the heart of the house of disbelief. The point was not meant to be subtle. If a Persian slave could cross the whole known world to reach the truth, what excuse does anyone have to stay where they were born?

When the dust settled, what remained

Ibn al-Qayyim sets Salman against Abu Talib one last time, and the contrast is the whole sermon. Ask Abu Talib his name, and he answers with his ancestry: I am of Abd Manaf. Ask his wealth, and he counts his camels, as all of Makkah counted. But ask Salman his name, and he says: Abdullah, a servant of Allah. Ask his lineage, and he says: I am the son of Islam. Ask his wealth, and he says: my wealth is my poverty. Ask what he has earned, and he says: patience. Ask where he is going, and he says: to the Garden. Ask who guides him there, and he names the guide of all of Allah's creation, Muhammad ﷺ.

Two men, two answers to the same questions. One answers with what he inherited, the other with what he chose. And Allah, Ibn al-Qayyim has Him say to the Prophet ﷺ, willed it so: you wanted Abu Talib, but We wanted Salman. This is the door into the rest of his life, because everything Salman became can be read in those answers. He arrived in Madinah with no tribe to claim him and no name the Arabs would recognise, already past fifty, an old man with nothing the world weighs. Out of that nothing he built an identity that needed no lineage at all. There is a line of verse the companions remembered him reciting: my father is Islam, I have no father besides it, when the others boast of their tribes. While the Arabs around him pointed back to their grandfathers, he pointed forward, to the only belonging that lasts.

The night in the trench

Where the first half of his life ended, the second began, in a ditch outside Madinah. The armies of the confederates were marching on the city to end the Muslims once and for all, and it was Salman who proposed the trench, the *Khandaq*, a defence the Arabs had never used. The Prophet ﷺ accepted the idea, and then did not stand back and watch others dig. He dug more than any man

there, bound stones against his stomach to dull the hunger, ate less than everyone and laboured more, covered in the mud of the trench. This was Salman's first battle, an old man with an axe, working beside the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in the cold.

He came to a great stone he could not break. The Prophet ﷺ took the axe from his hands and struck it, and as the stone split, a light flashed from it, and he recited:

*The word of your Lord is complete in its truth and justice.
No one can change His words: He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing.*

QUR'AN 6:115

He struck a second time, and a second light, and a third, and the stone came apart in light. Salman, astonished, asked what he was seeing, and the Prophet ﷺ was surprised that Salman saw it at all, for there were sights Allah showed His Messenger that the companions could not perceive, and that Salman saw the light was itself a sign of his rank. The Prophet ﷺ told him what the lights had been. At the first strike, the palaces of Kisra, emperor of Persia, had been raised up before his eyes, the light of Islam reaching the very empire Salman had fled. At the second, the palaces of Qaysar of Rome. At the third, the lands of Abyssinia and Yemen. They were huddled in a trench, half-starved, bracing to be wiped from the earth, and Allah was showing His Messenger ﷺ that this faith would reach the ends of the known world. The Prophet ﷺ prayed for the companions who longed to carry that light to the nations. Salman heard the prayer, not yet knowing that he would one day stand in those very palaces himself, with the Arabs at his back, in answer to it.

The son of Islam

After the trench, Salman was woven fully into the community, and his name settled on him: Salman, the son of Islam. Not of the Muhajirun by birth, not of the Ansar, not of Makkah or Madinah. When they asked his father, he said Islam, and meant it.

There is a moment the companions never forgot. The Prophet ﷺ was sitting among them when Surat al-Jumu'ah was revealed, and they reached the words about a people yet to come:

to them and others yet to join them. He is the Almighty, the Wise:

QUR'AN 62:3

One of the companions asked who these others were. The Prophet ﷺ was silent. He asked again, and again silence. The third time, the Prophet ﷺ laid his hand on the shoulder of Salman and said: it is this man and his descendants. Even if faith were hung among the stars, men from these people would reach up and seize it. He was telling them that this religion did not belong to the Arabs, or to any one people, or to any empire that might rise and fall. It would be carried by whoever sought it sincerely and would stop at nothing to find it. So many of the great imams and collectors of hadith of the generations to come were not Arabs at all, and whatever good came through them flowed back, in part, as the continuing charity of an old Persian who had given his whole life to find the truth.

The Prophet ﷺ kept him close. Salman was among the few with regular entry to his home, sitting with him in his private hours, and there is a quiet wonder in that. The boy who once tended the fire of the Magians now sat in the household of the Prophet ﷺ as revelation descended. He carried a rare learning, a scholar of the scriptures of his former faiths and now of Islam, fluent in their

languages, the first to translate a portion of the Qur'an into Persian. And yet, holding all of this knowledge, he was known above all for one thing: his silence. Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) called him the Luqman of this ummah, for like Luqman he rarely spoke, and when he did, men turned to listen. A man once came asking him for advice, and Salman said only: do not talk. The man asked again, and Salman answered: did I not tell you, stop talking. It was not emptiness. He had spent his whole life alone, before the fire, in the monasteries, passed from hand to hand in slavery, reaching Madinah in his fifties with no friend and no family. Out of all that solitude he had drawn a habit of inward listening, and he kept it among the companions: a man of few words, long worship, and a heart awake at night.

The guest who taught his host

When the Prophet ﷺ paired the Muhajirun with the Ansar so that each newcomer would have a brother, Salman was joined with Abu Darda (may Allah be pleased with him), a worshipper matched with a worshipper. But Salman, who had seen religion practised to excess and seen it practised hollow, watched his brother carefully. Abu Darda fasted constantly, prayed through the nights, and in his zeal had begun to neglect his own household, the wife of the house worn down and the home in disrepair. Salman did not like it.

When the meal was brought, Abu Darda would not eat, for he was fasting. Salman swore an oath that he must, and so he broke his voluntary fast and ate beside his guest. At night, when Abu Darda rose to pray, Salman told him to sleep, and insisted until he lay down, then woke him in the last third of the night, and the two of them prayed together when prayer was best. Then Salman said the words that have outlived the night they were spoken:

your self has a right over you, your family has a right over you, and your Lord has a right over you. Give each one its due.

Abu Darda, certain his guest had overstepped, took the matter to the Prophet ﷺ. And the Prophet ﷺ looked at him and said: Salman has spoken the truth. Salman has more understanding of the religion than you. Here was a man who had been with the Prophet ﷺ far longer being told that the newcomer grasped the spirit of the faith more truly than he did. Salman had lived among people who went too far and people who fell short, and had come to love the balance of this religion before he had spent years studying its details, understanding early and deeply that worship which crushed the self and abandoned the family was not the worship Allah wanted.

He never forgot Whose he was

His standing did not soften his readiness to speak when something was wrong. After the Prophet ﷺ passed away, Salman served the community as a commander in the armies, yet kept to his place of obscurity, contemplative, plain, and often unrecognised: a stranger in Madinah once mistook him for a poor labourer and ordered him to carry a load, and Salman lifted it without a word and bore it to the man's door, waving off the onlookers who rushed to take it from the great companion of the Prophet ﷺ.

He kept the same plainness before the powerful. In the long caliphate of Umar, with whom Salman was close, even a neighbour, there came a day when Umar stood before the people and said, listen and obey. Salman stood up and said: we will not listen, and we will not obey. A tyrant would have made an example of him. Umar only asked why. Salman said: you distributed a length of cloth to every one of us, one share each,

and yet you wear two. Explain yourself. And Umar did not pull rank. He had his son Abdullah stand and explain that Umar was a tall man whom one share would not cover, and that Abdullah had given his own share to his father so the cloth could be stitched together. Salman sat back down and said: now we will listen, and we will obey. He would not stay quiet before what he took to be injustice, even from the leader of the believers. He did not run his mouth, but when he spoke, it was for a reason that mattered.

Back to Persia

The Prophet ﷺ had written to the kings of the earth inviting them to Islam, and to Kisra, emperor of Persia, he sent a letter: accept Islam and be safe. The emperor, enraged that the Prophet ﷺ had placed his own name first, tore it to pieces and swore to destroy the man who had sent it. When word reached the Prophet ﷺ, he said: may Allah tear apart his kingdom. And the kingdom that had stood firm for decades came apart exactly so. His son killed him, and his daughter killed his son, and the throne passed through one hand of blood to the next until the empire that boasted it could never fall lay in ruins.

Then the Muslim armies marched, and Umar sent Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas at their head and Salman al-Farsi as his second, the Persian returning to Persia, now with the Arabs behind him. They drove deep into the empire and came at last to the Tigris, a river wide as a moat around al-Mada'in, where the great palace of Kisra stood. Sa'd swore that Allah would give His servants victory so long as no sin among the army voided their good deeds, and Salman answered that if their hearts were as Sa'd hoped, Allah would make the water yield to them as He had made the land yield, and they would cross and come out as they were. And so they did. Thirty thousand men crossed, and rose from the far

bank without losing so much as a cooking pot, and the Persians watching cried out that these were not men but spirits, and fled.

They came to the palace, and the Muslims turned to Salman, for these were his people and this his land, and asked what to do. He asked for the chance to call them first. He climbed down from his horse and walked toward them, and they stared, confused. A Persian, leading the Arabs? Surely a spy, a man bought off. Salman told them plainly: I am one of you, a Persian like you, and these Arabs follow me. Accept Islam and you will have the honour I have and the duties I have. Keep your own way, and we will leave you to it under your rights. He spoke to them in Persian, out of love for them, urging them toward the better path. They did not answer, and the palace was taken. And Salman, who had once been a slave passed from owner to owner, walked into the seat of the empire that had sold him.

Years before, on the night the Prophet ﷺ fled Makkah with a price on his head, he had told the pursuer Suraqah ibn Malik that he would one day wear the gold bracelets of Kisra. And in the trench, half-starved, the Prophet ﷺ had seen the palaces of Persia in the light of a breaking stone, and prayed that Salman would be among those who reached them. Now here he stood, inside them. The city was later renamed for him: Madinat Salman. He was made its governor and given that vast palace, and wanted none of it. He took a single room at the front, turned his back on the luxury, and gave his great salary away in charity. The man who could have lived in Persia as a king chose instead to plant date palms, tend them, and sell dates in the market like anyone else, calling his people gently to Allah, never forcing a soul, while the old religion of the land carried on around him unburned and uncoerced.

The traveller's provision

In his last years a letter came from Abu Darda, his old brother from the pairing in Madinah, now in Jerusalem. Come to the holy land, he wrote, let us live out our final years together in this blessed place. Salman wrote back the truth he had learned across a lifetime of wandering: the land makes no one holy. It is a man's deeds alone that make him holy. He had searched the whole earth and found that sanctity was never in the soil.

When death came for him in Persia, a visitor found him weeping, and asked why, when he had such a life behind him beside the Prophet ﷺ. Salman said he was not weeping out of love for this world, nor out of dread of meeting Allah. He was weeping because the Prophet ﷺ had once taken a promise from him: let your share of this world be no more than the provision of a traveller, a little to see you to the next stop. Palaces had come to him, and the world had spread itself before him, and now, near the end, he was afraid he had taken more than a traveller should. In the house of the man who had governed an empire's capital, they found only a blanket, some cooking utensils, and twenty coins. He died before the discord that would later split the companions, and Allah spared him from witnessing it.

Look back over the whole of it and the divine wisdom comes clear. The Romans crushed the Persians in the very year of Badr, burning and slaughtering across those lands, and Allah alone knows what would have become of Salman had he stayed. It is as if Allah lifted him off the map and kept him safe through years of solitude and slavery until the Prophet ﷺ came, then set him down in Madinah at exactly the right hour. Salman was never bitter about any of it. The Prophet ﷺ had taught him a saying he carried to the end: Allah is shy and generous, too generous to let a servant raise his hands to Him and then return them empty.

Every prayer Salman ever made, Allah had been answering, and every loss and every chain had been leading him precisely where Allah meant him to go.

What Salman's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel only the wonder of it, the slave who became a governor, the seeker who crossed the world. But Salman did not set out to become a remarkable man. He set out to find the truth and worship the One who is true, and everything else was given to him along the way. That is the first thing his life asks: not to admire the journey, but to want what he wanted.

He gave himself a name no one could take away. The world around him belonged to its tribes and its inheritances, and he answered every question about who he was with Allah and with this faith. Most of us define ourselves by things that will not follow us into the grave: our work, our standing, the opinion others hold of us. Salman's life asks whether, stripped of all of that, you would still know who you are. Loosen your grip on one thing you lean on for your sense of worth, and lean instead on the only belonging that lasts: that you are a servant of Allah, and that is enough.

He trusted the timing of his Lord through a lifetime that looked, from the inside, like one setback after another. Sold, enslaved, alone, an old man arriving with nothing. And it was all, every step, Allah answering his prayers in an order he could not yet see. This is the quality to carry into an ordinary life now: patience with the decree of Allah, and contentment that His timing is not yours and is better than yours. When your own life seems to be moving the wrong way, when the door you prayed at stays shut, Salman is the reminder that Allah is shy and generous, and does not return

empty the hands raised to Him. He is answering. You are simply not yet standing where you will one day stand, looking back, and understanding.

And he held the balance the Prophet ﷺ loved. Your self has a right over you, your family has a right over you, your Lord has a right over you. It is possible to lose yourself even in worship, to pour everything into one corner of the religion and let the rest of your duties fall, and call it devotion. Salman saw that this was not what Allah wanted. Real faith does not crush the body or abandon the people in your care. It gives each one its due, for the sake of Allah, and the giving itself is worship.

So take one thing from Salman into your week. Answer, in your own heart, that you belong to Allah before you belong to anything else. Trust His timing through one hardship without bitterness. Give each right its due, and do it for Him, not for the eyes of people. He searched the whole earth and learned that holiness is in deeds, not in places, and that the only provision worth carrying is the traveller's, a little for the road home. May Allah be pleased with Salman, the son of Islam, grant us a measure of his trust and contentment, and gather us among those who seek the truth and stop at nothing until they find it.

This chapter follows the account of Salman al-Farsi (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute), drawing on the meditation of Ibn al-Qayyim in al-Fawa'id. Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (6:115, 62:3). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Salman al-Farsi

The Truth Seeker

Picture a boy of about thirteen sitting beside an old man in Madinah. The old man is the same age as the Prophet ﷺ, with such bearing that the whole city falls quiet in awe of him. He walks freely into the household of the Prophet ﷺ. He is a Persian among Arabs, in a world where Persian and Arab carried a long, mutual coldness, and yet there is a distinction on this man that nobody can name. The boy, Abdullah ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him), cannot hold his curiosity. He asks the question that opens one of the most extraordinary accounts preserved in the Book of the Virtues of the Companions in Sahih al-Bukhari: he asks the old man to tell him his story.

And so Salman al-Farsi (may Allah be pleased with him) begins to unload an entire history: the Persian and Roman empires, forms of Christianity the Arabs had never heard existed, the many languages he had learned, and the many walls he had to climb to arrive, at last, in front of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. It is the most unlikely journey of any of the Companions, and to follow it is to watch a single human heart refuse, for over thirty years, to accept anything less than the truth.

A son chained to the fire

To understand where Salman ended, you have to see where he began. He was born Rozbeh, the son of Marzban, in Isfahan, in

Persia. His father was not merely a leader of his people; he was the high priest of his religion, Zoroastrianism, the worship of fire. So central was that role that some of the empire's coins bore not the face of the emperor but the image of priests gathered around the flame. People came from all around to worship at the fire that burned, quite literally, inside Salman's home.

His father loved him deeply, but it was a love that closed in around the boy like walls. Salman would say his father held him in the house the way one might keep a slave girl, never letting him out, never letting the world reach him. There were servants, palaces, properties; there was no reason on earth to leave. He was being raised for one thing only: to inherit his father's place as keeper of the fire, the fire that, by the creed of his people, must never be allowed to go out. So Salman tended it, learned its philosophies and its scriptures, and grew into a respected young priest of one of the world's oldest religions, breathing nothing but that one faith.

Then one day his father, too busy with his estates, sent his trusted son out to tend a garden. It was the first time Salman had truly left home, and he got lost. That is how sheltered he was: he did not even know the way to the garden.

The recitation in the church

While he was lost, he passed a church, and from inside came the sound of recitation. Religion was the only language Salman knew, and the sound pulled at him, so he stepped inside the way a person steps into a mosque for the first time and sits quietly at the back, watching. He was amazed by their recitation, their bowing, their prostration. He sat as one hour passed, then two, and a realization settled. Their religion, he thought, is better than

ours. He had been a trained priest his whole life, and yet something in this worship was purer than anything he had known.

When their last prayer finished at sunset, Salman went to the priest and asked the only question on his mind: where did this religion come from? The man told him it came from Ash-Sham, greater Syria. Salman walked home with his world shaken loose.

His father, meanwhile, had thrown the whole city into panic searching for him. When the boy appeared, his father embraced him and asked where he had been, and Salman told him the truth: he had heard recitation, gone in, and watched them pray. Then he said the thing his father had spent a lifetime trying to prevent: "I think their religion is better than ours." His father did not reason with him or defend his own faith. He panicked, and reacted with cruelty, binding his son's hands and feet and imprisoning him in his own home. The beloved heir whom worshippers greeted every week was now chained and shamed before the very people who had once revered him.

It did not work. The harder his father pressed, the more Salman wanted the truth. From his imprisonment, with the quiet help of a servant, he got a message to the Christians: when the next caravan comes from Ash-Sham, tell me. Some time later the merchants came, finished their trade, and word was smuggled back. Salman slipped out of his chains and joined them.

This was no small thing. Persia and Rome had fought the longest war in history, over seven hundred years, their religions and politics so intertwined that to be Persian was to be tied to the fire and to be Roman to the church. Salman was a civilian from one side walking openly into the lands of the other, where things could turn deadly at any moment. He went anyway. He wanted the source.

From teacher to teacher

In Damascus he did not waste a day exploring the city. He asked at once: who is the most knowledgeable person here in this religion? They took him to a priest, and Salman made his offer. He asked for no money and no position, only to stay and serve, to learn and to pray. He understood, even this young, the value of sitting at the feet of a teacher. The man accepted him.

And the man turned out to be the most corrupt human being Salman had ever met. He preached beautifully about charity, then hoarded the people's most precious offerings in the church, passing a few coins to the poor while he kept the rest. He did the opposite of everything he commanded. Salman, who knew where the treasure was hidden, despised him and could not see how to expose him, a young, unknown Persian against the beloved leader of the church.

Here was the test. Salman had left his father, his home, and his standing to find a pure faith, and the first teacher of that faith was a thief. He could have crept back to Persia. He did not. He drew a distinction that reveals the wisdom in him: the failure of this man was the failure of this man alone, not of the religion. The truth was still the truth, even if its supposed teacher had betrayed it.

Then the priest died, and the people gathered to mourn their beloved leader. Salman stood up and told them the truth: this man was a fraud who kept for himself what he commanded you to give. Their anger turned on him, until he said, "Follow me, and I will show you." He led them to the priest's quarters and pulled out the hidden chests, the gold and silver and bracelets the people had given as charity to the poor. Their grief turned to rage; they refused to bury him, crucified the corpse, and pelted it with stones until it rotted.

The new priest was the opposite. Salman said he had never seen a man more righteous, one who worshipped night and day, wept over the scripture, and gave away everything he had. Salman loved him as he had never loved anyone. After the test of the road came the sweetness, and Salman drank it in.

But this teacher, too, neared death. At his bedside, weeping, Salman asked what he should do. The man told him the truth that would set the rest of his life in motion: the people had changed and abandoned the religion of Jesus, peace be upon him, all but one man, a scholar in Mosul. Go to him.

So Salman crossed the world again, with no direct routes, no protection, and no experience. He found the man in Mosul, learned from him, and found him righteous, until that teacher too neared death and sent him onward to a man in Nusaybin, who in turn sent him to a man in Amuriyya, in the land of Anatolia. The teacher in Amuriyya, in turn, sent him back to Ash-Sham, to one last man, where his journey had begun. Each teacher gave him a different perspective within the same faith; each refined his character a little more. From Persia to Damascus to Mosul to Nusaybin to Amuriyya and back to Ash-Sham, Salman gathered knowledge and patience, burying one righteous teacher after another, the last gems of the People of the Book in a sea of those who had gone astray. And when this final teacher in Ash-Sham neared death, Salman asked the same question he had asked for decades: where do I go now?

The three signs

This time the answer was different. The teacher told him there was no longer anyone left upon the pure way. But, he said, the time had come for Allah to send the next prophet, a descendant of Ibrahim, a messenger whose name would be Ahmad. He would

appear in the land of the Arabs and migrate to a place between two fields of black rock, a land known by its palm trees. And he gave Salman three signs: between his shoulder blades a seal of prophethood, a mark unlike any on another human being; he would not eat from charity given to him; and he would eat from a gift.

So now Salman was being sent not from city to city, but toward a person he had to find in the vastness of Arabia: a man with palm trees, two lava fields, and a seal on his back. He buried his last teacher and waited in Ash-Sham, watching for a caravan to the land of the Arabs.

A group of merchants came from the tribe of Banu Kalb. Salman made them his offer: take everything I own, my cattle and my sheep, only carry me to your land. They agreed. But at a stop near Wadi al-Qura, they turned on him, bound him, and sold him into slavery. The free man on a sacred journey was now a captive, sold from owner to owner more than a dozen times, each with a different temper and a different cruelty, years vanishing into bondage.

He was now in his fifties, the same age as the Prophet ﷺ, his youth gone. A high priest's son, a scholar of the Torah and the Gospel, fluent in Persian and Hebrew and Aramaic, he was passed from hand to hand among the Arabs with no one to protect him. At last he was sold to a Jewish man from Madinah and brought to a garden of palm trees, in a town set between two fields of black rock. Salman noticed: this might be it. But he said nothing, and worked, and waited for a sign from Allah.

"Is he the one?"

One day, high in a palm tree picking dates with his master resting below, Salman heard the master's cousin arrive in a fury. In a single breath the man spat out news that nearly knocked Salman from the tree: a man from Makkah had come to Quba, claiming to be a prophet, and the people were gathering around him. Salman shook so hard he had to grip the branches. He climbed down and pressed the cousin: what did you say? His master seized him, struck him in the face, and told him to get back to work.

The next day Salman asked the woman of the house for leave, sold some firewood, bought some dates, and hurried to Quba. He would not let his hope run wild; he had been disappointed too many times. He needed to test the man against the signs. He set down the dates and said he had heard this man was righteous and in need, and that here was some charity for him and his companions. The Prophet ﷺ thanked him, spread out a garment, told the Companions to eat, and did not touch a single date himself. One sign. He did not eat from charity.

Days later Salman returned with more dates and said, this time, that it was a gift. The Prophet ﷺ spread the garment again, and this time he ate alongside his Companions. Two signs. The third was the hardest: the seal on the back. How does a foreign slave from nowhere ask to see a man's back without arousing suspicion? So Salman began to watch, following whenever he could, hoping the garment might shift.

The first time he saw it was at a funeral, the burial of the first Companion laid to rest in al-Baqi. Salman watched from behind the gathering as the Prophet ﷺ prayed and lowered the body into the grave, and as the shawl on his back moved, Salman edged closer, searching. The Prophet ﷺ understood, and lowered his garment. There it was: the seal he had been seeking

for over thirty years, in the middle of a funeral, at the far edge of the world from where he was born. Salman could not hold himself back. He threw himself onto the Prophet ﷺ and kissed the seal, weeping and weeping, while the Companions watched this strange Persian man, bewildered, and the Prophet ﷺ let him.

When he had finally calmed, the Prophet ﷺ asked him to turn around, and said simply, "Tell me your story." And Salman told him everything, from Persia to Damascus to Iraq to Anatolia, ending with the words, "and I was looking for you," and then he broke down again. The corruption, the chains, the beatings, the decades of searching: all of it melted away as the man arrived at last before the Prophet ﷺ, who listened.

Salman is from us

His trial was not quite over. His master refused to free him, and though the Prophet ﷺ kept urging Salman toward freedom, the owner would set no fair price. Salman grieved, not for comfort, but because slavery made him miss being beside the Prophet ﷺ, and miss the battle of Badr. So the Prophet ﷺ told him to ask for any terms at all. The master demanded the near impossible: three hundred date palms, planted and seen alive, and forty ounces of gold, over a thousand grams. Salman was so disheartened he did not even go back to report it.

But the Prophet ﷺ sought him out, heard the terms, and without hesitation called the Companions: help your brother. Salman was a Persian with no tribe, no clan, nothing to offer, and yet the Prophet ﷺ did not tell him to be patient and wait for Paradise. He mobilized the whole community. The Companions came carrying their palm saplings, one bringing a few, another ten, and Uthman, never outdone in generosity, bringing the land, until three hundred were gathered. Then Salman dug the three hundred

holes, and the Prophet ﷺ himself went down into every one and planted each tree with his own hands, and they all took root and lived. As for the gold, a man brought the Prophet ﷺ a lump of it as a gift; he handed it to Salman, and weighed, it came out to exactly forty ounces. Salman was free, and from that day he never missed an occasion beside the Prophet ﷺ again.

And so the son of a fire priest in Isfahan, who had crossed warring empires and survived a dozen owners, became a scholar of the Torah, the Gospel, the Qur'an, and the Zoroastrian scriptures, fluent in four tongues, said to be the first to render parts of the Qur'an into another language for the Prophet ﷺ.

His first battle was the hardest of all. The largest army the Arabs had ever assembled gathered to wipe out Madinah at al-Khandaq, the trench. As the Prophet ﷺ asked his Companions for counsel, Salman spoke: in Persia, when the enemy gathered, we would dig a trench. Madinah sat protected between its two lava fields, so a single trench across the open side would shield the city and slow the vast army to a halt. The Prophet ﷺ was pleased, and the trench became the means by which Allah protected Madinah. Then the tribes began to compete over Salman, the man with no tribe of his own. The Ansar said he was one of them; the Muhajirun said he was theirs. And the Prophet ﷺ settled it: "Salman is from us, the people of my household." Salman was family.

The two empires that had loomed over Salman's whole life both fell in the time of the Prophet ﷺ, and the turn of one had been promised in the Qur'an before it happened, in words that pledged victory would follow defeat:

The Byzantines have been defeated in a nearby land. They will reverse their defeat with a victory in a few years' time.

God is in command, first and last. On that day, the believers will rejoice

QUR'AN 30:2-4

What Salman's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like Salman's and feel only awe at its strangeness, the fire temple, the warring empires, the thirteen masters. But his life is not a curiosity to marvel at from a distance. It is a question put directly to our own iman.

He wanted the truth more than he wanted comfort. He had everything a person is told to want: wealth, a great inheritance, a father's love, a guaranteed position. He left all of it because something in him knew it was not true, and he would not lie to himself. Most of us are not asked to give up a fire temple. But every one of us is asked, daily, to choose between what is easy and what is true, between the faith of habit and the faith we actually examine and hold. Salman's life asks whether you want the truth enough to be inconvenienced by it, enough to keep moving when staying put would be so much simpler.

He trusted Allah's promise through one disappointment after another, and never let a setback turn him bitter. A corrupt teacher did not break his faith; nor did chains; nor did being sold into slavery a dozen times. Each blow he turned into a new connection to Allah. This is the heart of the matter for an ordinary life: hardship is coming, and when it comes it will feel like the path to Allah has closed. Salman shows that the closing of one door is not the closing of Allah's care, that the believer keeps walking and lets the difficulty deepen his reliance rather than poison it. And when the truth itself disappointed him through a fraudulent priest, he refused to blame the religion for the failures of a man. Hold that close, because you will meet people who

carry the name of faith and betray it, and the question will be whether you abandon Allah because someone misrepresented Him.

He was sincere when no one was watching and there was nothing to gain. He served teachers for years asking only to learn. He told the truth about a beloved priest knowing it might cost him his life. He never performed his search for an audience; there was no audience, only Allah. That is ikhlas, doing the deed for Allah alone and being content that He has seen it. Ask how much of your own striving needs a witness, and how much you could do the way Salman did, quietly, for the One who never looks away.

And here is what should lift your heart: none of it was wasted. Decades of searching that must have seemed, from the outside, like the wandering of a man who could not settle, were in truth a straight line drawn by Allah from a fire temple in Isfahan to the household of the Prophet ﷺ. The slavery that stole his years placed him in the one town between two lava fields. The lonely road delivered him to the very face he had crossed the world to find. What looked like a life thrown away on an impossible search was, all along, the most direct journey home. This is the promise that should change how you spend your days: what you seek for Allah's sake, He guides you to; what you endure on the way, He counts. The path may bend through losses you cannot understand, and still arrive exactly where He intended.

So take one thing from Salman into your ordinary life. Examine one belief you have only ever inherited, and seek its truth honestly. Endure one hardship without letting it sour your trust in Allah. Do one act of devotion that no one will ever see. That is how the truth seeker lived, and it is a road still open to anyone

willing to walk it. May Allah be pleased with Salman al-Farsi, grant us a measure of his longing for the truth and his patience upon the way, and gather us in the household of the Prophet ﷺ as He gathered him.

This chapter follows the account of Salman al-Farsi (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (30:2-4). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abdullah ibn Salam

The Righteous Rabbi

There is a kind of believer who arrives at faith out of exhaustion, sick of the life he was living and ready for anything new. And there is another kind, rarer and quieter, who is already on his knees in worship, already searching the scriptures by lamplight, already certain that God is One and that a messenger is coming, and who is simply waiting for him to arrive so that he can run to him. Abdullah ibn Salam (may Allah be pleased with him) was the second kind. He did not stumble into Islam. He had been preparing for it his whole life.

He was the chief rabbi of Madinah, the most senior scholar of the Jewish tribes of that city, and when the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ finally came over the horizon, this learned old man climbed down from the top of a palm tree, looked once at the Prophet's face, and knew.

A scholar waiting for a prophet

His name, before Islam, was al-Husayn ibn Salam, a descendant of Ya'qub, and more particularly of Yusuf (peace be upon them), from the tribe of Banu Qaynuqa, one of the three main Jewish tribes who had settled in Yathrib. They had come to that land for a reason. The scriptures they studied described a prophet who would arise in exactly such a place, and so generations had made their home there, watching for the signs.

In a city torn apart by the long blood feud between the Aws and the Khazraj, the Jewish tribes stood a little to the side of the fighting. They were respected as people of a book, learned, prosperous, woven into the trade and the social life of the town. Even the pagans of Makkah, who rejected the Prophet ﷺ with such malice, held the People of the Book in a strange regard, granting them a standing they would never grant a man from Banu Hashim. Into this world, al-Husayn ibn Salam was born to lead.

Among his people he was known for two things above all: his knowledge and his character. He was called the most knowledgeable man in Madinah, and people sang his praises openly, naming him the most honest, the most pious, the most humble among them. What was remarkable was that a man of such religious authority refused to trade on it. He never used his rank to gain an advantage in the marketplace. He worked his own gardens, picked his own dates, and sold his wheat and barley in the market like any ordinary man, because he wanted his living to be honest and his hands to be clean. They said he was extremely gentle, a soft, kind man.

His days had a shape to them. He divided his time into three parts. One third he spent in the synagogue, worshipping and teaching the Torah to the people. One third he spent alone, in private, reciting scripture and remembering God. And one third he gave to his fields and his trade, his honest work in the date palms. Public worship, private worship, and lawful labour, each given its portion. This was the rhythm of a serious man.

And there was one part of the Torah to which his heart was especially attached: the verses that spoke of a prophet still to come. He studied them. He taught them. And he prayed, as he

grew older, that God would let him live long enough to meet that prophet and stand at his side. He was twenty years older than the Prophet ﷺ, by some narrations ten, but in either case a senior man, ageing, and longing. His longing was the same longing that had burned in Waraqah ibn Nawfal in Makkah, the old scholar who had wished he could live to support the Prophet ﷺ when his people drove him out.

The cry from the palm tree

He had learned something precise from his reading. He understood that this prophet would not rise from the soil of Yathrib itself, but would come to it after a migration, that there would be a persecution and a flight before he arrived. So when news began to travel that a man in Makkah was claiming prophethood, Abdullah ibn Salam started, quietly, to investigate.

He questioned the travellers who passed through from Makkah. He asked about the man's name, his qualities, his character, his claims, what people were saying of him. And every single thing he heard matched, perfectly, what he had been studying in the Torah for so many years. His anticipation grew. Then word came that the Prophet ﷺ had left Makkah and was heading for Yathrib, and the people of the city went out day after day, watching the road, waiting for him to reach the village of Quba.

Abdullah ibn Salam tells the rest in his own voice, and he tells it vividly. Every day, working in his palm trees, he would climb to the very top and study the scene below, watching to see how the messenger would be received. One day he was at the top of a palm tree when a commotion broke out, and the Ansar began to shout that the Prophet ﷺ had arrived. And without a moment's thought, before he could weigh it or contain it, the old rabbi cried out from the treetop, "Allahu akbar! Allahu akbar!"

His aunt, a woman named Khalidah, who would herself become Muslim afterward, looked up at him in confusion. She said to him words that show how distant all of this was supposed to be from their affairs: "May God disappoint you. By God, if you had heard that Musa ibn Imran had come, you would not show this much excitement." What is this? Why are you so moved? This was, to her, the business of the Ansar, not of their people.

And he answered her with everything in his heart. "O my aunt," he said, "by God, he is the brother of Musa, and he is upon his religion, and he was sent with what Musa was sent with." She paused at that. Then she asked the question that hung over the whole age: "Is he the prophet we were told about, the one who comes with the Hour following close behind him?" There was in their scripture an understanding that the last prophet would arrive near the end, that his coming and the Day of Judgement were close together. The Prophet ﷺ himself would say that his sending and the coming of the Hour were like two fingers held side by side. Abdullah said, "Yes." And his aunt said, "In that case, then." She believed too.

"That is not the face of a liar"

So he went out to where the people were gathered. He pushed his way through the crowd that thronged around the Prophet ﷺ, the Ansar pressing close in their joy, until he could get a clear, near look at his face. And before a single question was asked, before the Prophet ﷺ had even opened his mouth, the old scholar looked at him and said within himself, "That is not the face of a liar."

He had read about this man for decades. Now he stood before him, and the face he saw was brighter than the full moon, and the first thing he witnessed was the Prophet ﷺ rising to address the

people of Madinah for the very first time. Imagine the weight of a first impression. A city that could not stop its own bloodshed had just handed full authority to a stranger with a new religion, and his enemies in Makkah had spread the charge that his faith tore families apart and ruined the peace of any society it touched. What would his first words be, now that the power was real?

He said: "O people, spread peace, and feed one another, and keep the ties of kinship, and pray at night while people sleep, and you will enter Paradise in peace."

Spread peace. Not peace among ourselves only, but peace. Feed one another, and do not leave out the poor. Keep the ties of kinship, the very thing they said he came to sever, when in truth he came to bind them, for the ties of kinship are tied to the Throne of the Most Merciful. And pray at night while others sleep. This was the man Abdullah ibn Salam had waited his whole life to meet, and these were his words. The face had told him the truth, and now the speech confirmed it.

A new name, and a test

After the Prophet ﷺ finished, he turned to the man sitting near him and asked his name. "Al-Husayn ibn Salam," he answered. The Prophet ﷺ said, "You are Abdullah ibn Salam." And the old rabbi said at once, "Abdullah ibn Salam it is, and I do not wish to be called by any other name." We are not told exactly why the Prophet ﷺ chose for him that name, Abdullah, the servant of Allah, one of the most beloved of all names to God. Perhaps he saw in this man the very qualities the name describes. From that moment, the chief rabbi of Madinah carried it gladly.

Then Abdullah ibn Salam said something that revealed how completely he had submitted, and how shrewdly he understood

his own people. He bore witness that the Prophet ﷺ was the Messenger of Allah and that he had come with the truth. And he said, "The Jews know that I am their chief and the son of their chief, the most knowledgeable among them and the son of the most knowledgeable among them." Then he made a request that was really a test: "Call them, and ask them about me before they know that I have become Muslim. For if they know I have accepted Islam, they will say of me what is not true."

It was an echo of the Prophet's own story. On the hill of Safa, before his message changed everything, the people of Makkah had borne witness that he was as-Sadiq al-Amin, the truthful, the trustworthy. The instant he called them to the truth, the praise curdled into slander. Abdullah ibn Salam knew the same thing would happen to him, and he wanted the Prophet ﷺ to hear it for himself.

So the Prophet ﷺ called the Jewish leaders, and Abdullah ibn Salam hid behind a curtain. The Prophet ﷺ invited them to Islam and reminded them that they knew him from the descriptions in their own scripture. They refused. Then he asked them, "What is Abdullah ibn Salam among you?" And they answered exactly as he had foretold: "He is our chief and the son of our chief, the most knowledgeable of us and the son of the most knowledgeable of us." The Prophet ﷺ asked, "What if he became Muslim?" They said, "God forbid. He would never do that." And at that, the Prophet ﷺ said, "O Abdullah, come out." He stepped from behind the curtain and called them to the truth, declaring that this was the messenger they had been waiting for, who had come with the truth. And they turned their backs on him. The man they had crowned with every honour a moment before, they now denounced.

A witness from the Children of Israel

What had happened was not small. The most senior Jewish scholar in Madinah had embraced the Prophet ﷺ with no hesitation at all, had run out to meet him before the message had even taken root in the city. And Allah revealed about this man more than once in the Qur'an, which is itself an extraordinary distinction for any companion.

Surah al-Ahqaf carries one of the last verses revealed in Makkah, addressed to the proud Makkans who held the People of the Book in such regard yet rejected the Prophet ﷺ themselves. The scholars say it was a glad tiding given even before Abdullah ibn Salam formally accepted Islam, a sign of what he would do:

Say, 'Have you thought: what if this Quran really is from God and you reject it? What if one of the Children of Israel testifies to its similarity [to earlier scripture] and believes in it, and yet you are too proud to [do the same]? God certainly does not guide evildoers.'

QUR'AN 46:10

The companions and the early scholars understood that the one who testifies in this verse is Abdullah ibn Salam. Here was the answer to Makkah's pride: the very kind of learned man they respected, a rabbi steeped in scripture, had recognised the truth and bowed to it, while they stood back in arrogance.

He was named in the Qur'an again. When Allah described those of the People of the Book who did not reject the message, the commentators pointed to Abdullah ibn Salam as the foremost example:

But they are not all alike. There are some among the People of the Book who are upright, who recite God's revelations

And when the deniers said to the Prophet ﷺ that he had never been sent, Allah told him to answer that God was sufficient as a witness between them, and so too was the one who had true knowledge of the Scripture. Here again, the scholars said, was a reference to Abdullah ibn Salam, whose mastery of the Torah made his testimony undeniable.

He was a man of firsts. The first formal rabbi we know of to embrace Islam. The first person from Madinah whose faith Allah testified to in the Qur'an, in more than one verse. And the first person of Madinah to be promised Paradise. In Sahih al-Bukhari, in the chapter on his virtues, Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas (may Allah be pleased with him) said that he never heard the Prophet ﷺ say of anyone walking on the earth that he was among the people of Paradise except for Abdullah ibn Salam. The Prophet ﷺ would say it more than once. A man would be told that one of the people of Paradise was about to enter, and in would walk Abdullah ibn Salam.

From the Torah to the Qur'an

The man who had divided his old life between the synagogue and his fields now turned the same devotion toward the Qur'an. He moved his worship from the synagogue to the mosque, his study from the Torah to the Qur'an, and gave himself to the Prophet ﷺ as student, scholar, and adviser, helping him navigate the dynamics of the tribes around them. The reports about him after his conversion nearly all circle the Qur'an: a man hungry to become as great a scholar of it as he had already been of the Torah.

There is a narration that captures what his heart was reaching for. He and a group of companions were sitting together, and they said to one another that if only they knew which deeds were most beloved to Allah, they would devote themselves to them. And Allah revealed the opening of Surah as-Saff:

Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies God: He is the Almighty, the Wise. You who believe, why do you say things and then do not do them?

QUR'AN 61:1-2

The most beloved thing, then, is sincerity: that a believer's deeds match his words, that he avoids the hollowness of saying what he will not do. Abdullah ibn Salam said the Prophet ﷺ recited these verses to them, and then the chain of recitation passed on, hand to hand, down the generations, the way knowledge always travelled among these people.

A man of the next generation, Qays ibn Ubad, told another story. He was sitting in the Prophet's mosque in Madinah when a man walked in with the signs of humility, of khushu', written plainly on his face. Just as Abdullah ibn Salam had once looked at the Prophet's face and read the truth in it, now a young student looked at Abdullah's face and saw devotion in it. Two companions present, by one report Abdullah ibn Umar and Sa'd, said quietly, "That is a man from the people of Paradise." The man prayed two light units of prayer and left, and Qays followed him out and told him what had been said. The old scholar, in his humility, answered that people should not say what they do not know for certain. But Qays pressed him: what lay behind such a testimony?

So he told him about a dream. He had seen himself in a green and spacious garden, beautiful beyond description, and in the middle of it stood a pole of iron, its base fixed in the ground and its top lost high in the sky. At the very top was a handhold. A voice said to him, "Ascend." He said he could not reach it, but then someone came beneath him and lifted him up, and he climbed until he grasped the handhold at the top, and he held it fast. He woke with his hand still clenched around it. He brought the dream to the Prophet ﷺ, who was filled with joy and told him what it meant: "The garden is Islam. The pole is the pillar of Islam. And that handhold is the firmest handhold, al-urwah al-wuthqa. You will hold to Islam until you die." In one narration he added, "And you are from the people of Paradise."

Think of what such a man feared. Not poverty, not the enemy. He feared losing his faith before the end. And the Prophet ﷺ set that fear to rest forever: you will not merely find Islam, you will hold it until your last breath.

A scholar to seek out

Knowledge such as his does not vanish when a man changes religion. He carried into Islam the same rigour, literacy, and depth that had made him the foremost scholar of the Torah, and he became one of the great scholars of the companions. When Mu'adh ibn Jabal (may Allah be pleased with him), the mufti among the companions, lay dying and was asked for a final counsel, he told the people to seek knowledge from four men, and Abdullah ibn Salam was among them, named alongside Salman al-Farsi, Abu Darda, and Abdullah ibn Mas'ud.

His legacy ran on through his family. He had two sons born in Islam, and the names are tender to consider. He was a descendant of Yusuf, so he named his first son Yusuf, and indeed

the Prophet ﷺ himself gave the boy that name, drew him close, and wiped his head as a child. The second he named Muhammad. Both became scholars, and their children after them became scholars and teachers in their own generations.

He spent his energy as a teacher and a guide. When Abu Burda came to Madinah, Abdullah ibn Salam came to him at once, greeted him, and said, "Come to my house and let me feed you some of the best I have," and then took him into a home the Prophet ﷺ had once entered. And he warned him plainly: "You are in a land where people deal in riba. If someone gives you a present in the middle of a dealing, do not take it, for that is a doorway to interest." Practical, watchful, generous: the same man who had once kept his own hands clean in the marketplace.

He lived to see Jerusalem opened under Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), and his name is recorded among those who entered al-Quds when it was freed: the scholar of the Torah and the Qur'an, walking into that ancient city.

The last voice before the storm

He also lived long enough to see the fitna, the turmoil that broke out after the golden years, when men who had never met the Prophet ﷺ grew extreme, hurling accusations, and laid siege to the house of the Caliph Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him). Uthman would not let the companions shed their blood in his defence. As the siege closed in, Abdullah ibn Salam went to him and offered his help. Uthman told him, "Then go out to them, for you are of more benefit to me out there than inside my home." Calm them, if you can.

He was the last companion to stand before that mob and try to wake them. After Ali had tried, after others had tried, this old

scholar rose and spoke from the depth of all he knew of the histories of nations. "O people," he said, "do not unsheathe the sword of Allah against yourselves, for if you draw it, it will not be put away until the Day of Judgement. You are about to kill a righteous man. Your ruler today is gentle with you. If you kill him, you will be ruled only with harshness after him." And he warned them that this city was surrounded by angels, and that if they shed this blood the angels would leave them, just as ruin had once fallen upon a people who slaughtered the prophet Yahya ibn Zakariya. He was pleading with them to see the mercy God had given them and not to throw it away.

They answered him with contempt. "Sit down, you Jew. We will kill you and we will kill him." And they pushed him aside and went and killed Uthman. The man whose face had been read for truth, whose word had been sought as scholarship, was dismissed by people who imagined they were reciting the Qur'an while their hearts had turned against everything in it.

There is one more scene. When Ali set out for Iraq to put down the chaos, Abdullah ibn Salam came to him and implored him from that same well of wisdom: "Hold to the pulpit of the Messenger of Allah and do not leave Madinah. If you leave it, you will never see it again." Ali went, and he was killed in Kufa, in the very land of turmoil. Abdullah ibn Salam, for his part, withdrew. He wanted no part of war between believers. He shut his door, kept to the narration of the Prophet's hadith, and stayed in Madinah. He died a natural death in the year forty-three after the Hijra, close to a hundred years old, and was buried in al-Baqi among the family and the companions of the Prophet ﷺ.

What this life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read the story of Abdullah ibn Salam as the story of a brilliant man who simply recognised the truth faster than others, and to leave it at admiration. But there is a deeper thing his life asks of us, and it has to do with what a person does with knowledge once he has it.

He knew. For years before the Prophet ﷺ arrived, this man held the proofs in his hands. The verses of his own scripture pointed to a coming messenger, and he believed them. But notice what he did with that knowledge: he did not hoard it, did not bury it under his rank and comfort, did not wait to see how it would profit him. He prayed to live long enough to follow the prophet, climbed the palm tree every day to watch the road for him, and the instant the man appeared, he ran to him and submitted, knowing it would cost him everything he had built. How many of us already know what Allah asks of us, and stall? We know the prayer is owed and we delay it. We know the wealth should be given and we hold it back. We know the sin should be left and we keep returning to it. The first thing his life asks is whether your heart, when it sees the truth, actually moves toward it, or merely admires it from the top of the tree.

Then consider the manner of his knowing. When he looked at the Prophet's face he saw the truth in it, but he did not stop at a feeling. His faith was the faith of a careful man who had studied for decades and then committed completely when the proof was before him. This is the balance Islam asks of you: a heart that recognises truth and a mind that verifies it, neither blind nor cold. Trust Allah and His promise the way Abdullah ibn Salam trusted, with the certainty of someone who has looked closely and then given himself wholly. Faith is not the refusal to think. It is thinking honestly, and then surrendering.

Watch, too, what he refused to do with his status, both before Islam and after. As a rabbi he would not trade on his religious authority for an easy living, but worked his own fields and sold his own barley. As a companion, when the mob called him a Jew and spat his old name back at him, he did not defend his honour, he tried to save their souls. He had spent his life dividing his days into worship, worship, and honest work, and asking God only that he be allowed to follow the prophet. That is ikhlas, sincerity, the thing Allah named most beloved in the verse revealed to his very circle: that your deeds match your words, that you work for Allah and not for the eyes or the praise of people. Ask yourself how much of your religion is performed to be seen, and how much you would still do behind a curtain, the way he once stood, unseen, certain of his Lord.

And take heart from the fear he carried and the answer he received. The thing he dreaded was not loss or death but that he might let go of faith before the end. In the dream, he could not reach the handhold by his own strength, and someone lifted him until he grasped it and held it fast. That is the truth of every believer's life. We do not hold to Islam by our own power. We ask, and Allah lifts us, and we cling to the firmest handhold by His mercy until we die. So make his fear your fear and his prayer your prayer: not for wealth, not for safety, but to be kept upon the truth until the last breath, and to be raised among the people who held the handhold and never let go.

Do one thing today the way he did it. Act on something you already know Allah wants from you, without delay. Give or pray or forgive in a way no one will ever see. And ask Allah, plainly, to keep your hand closed around faith until He takes you. May Allah be pleased with Abdullah ibn Salam, the righteous rabbi who knew his Lord before he met His messenger, and may Allah grant

us the certainty to run toward the truth the moment we see it, and the mercy to hold it until we die.

This chapter follows the account of Abdullah ibn Salam (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (46:10, 3:113, 61:1-2; verse 13:43 referenced in prose). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abu Ayyub al-Ansari

The Host of the Prophet

There is a way to measure a man that has nothing to do with what he owns or builds: who is chosen to stand near greatness, and why. When the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ finally entered the city that had waited years for him, every household in al-Madinah wanted him. The noblest of the Ansar reached for the reins of his camel, each begging him to stay under their roof. He chose none of them by his own hand. He let the camel walk, told the people it was commanded by Allah, and watched where it would kneel. It knelt in front of one door, and the man behind that door spent the rest of his life known by a single thing: he had hosted the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

His name was Abu Ayyub al-Ansari (may Allah be pleased with him), and to understand how much it means that Allah chose him out of all the Ansar, you have to remember who the Ansar were.

A man Allah chose from among the chosen

The Ansar were the people who had already given everything before they had been asked for anything. They had taken in strangers fleeing persecution, opened their homes, split their wealth, and loved men they had only just met, for no reason except that those men loved the Prophet ﷺ. Allah praised them in His own Book for loving those who migrated to them and preferring others over themselves. To be remarkable inside a

group like that is no small thing. So when the camel knelt at one door, it was not an accident of geography. The Prophet ﷺ did not pick the finest house, nor the home of the most powerful chief. Allah chose Abu Ayyub, and when Allah chooses a person for such an honor, it tells you something of what He had already seen in his heart.

His real name was not even Abu Ayyub. It was Khalid ibn Zayd ibn Kulayb, of the tribe of Banu Najjar, the same maternal lineage from which the Prophet ﷺ himself descended, for the great-grandmother of the Prophet ﷺ, the mother of Abdul Muttalib, had come from that tribe. There is a quiet symmetry in it. The very district where Abu Ayyub lived, where the mosque and the grave of the Prophet ﷺ would one day stand, was the same ground where Abdul Muttalib had grown up as a boy, never imagining his greatest descendant would one day return to change the world from there.

Of his life before Islam the books are nearly silent. He was not a politician of Yathrib jockeying for position. He was known for being generous and good to his people, and that was all. Then he traveled to Makkah with the seventy or so who gave the second pledge of Aqabah, swearing to receive the Prophet ﷺ and protect him as they protected their own families. He was among the earliest of al-Madinah, one of those who prepared the city for its Messenger before the Messenger ever arrived.

The house with two stories

When the camel knelt and walked and turned and finally settled before his door, Abu Ayyub and his wife Umm Ayyub were overcome with joy. The mosque was not yet built; it would rise on whatever land the Prophet ﷺ chose, and the camel had chosen theirs. Their home had two stories: the Prophet ﷺ and his wife

Sawda (may Allah be pleased with her) could take one floor, and Abu Ayyub and his wife the other.

But which floor should the Prophet ﷺ take? The ground floor made sense, where he could receive the streams of visitors and conduct the affairs of a city now looking to him as its leader. He settled downstairs. And immediately Abu Ayyub and Umm Ayyub were thrown into a kind of holy distress: how could they sleep above the head of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, letting their footsteps fall over the place where he lay? That first night they pressed themselves against the wall, lying awkwardly through the dark hours, because the thought of walking over him was unbearable.

The Prophet ﷺ noticed their exhaustion and asked what was wrong. Abu Ayyub confessed it: "Messenger of Allah, are we to walk above your head?" He begged him to move upstairs. The Prophet ﷺ gently refused. "Take it easy, Abu Ayyub," he told him; the lower floor made more sense, and there was no sin in it. But Abu Ayyub could not do it. He went on hugging the wall.

Then one night water spilled upstairs, and in those homes water seeped down through the roof. The very thing they dreaded had come true: it might drip onto the Prophet ﷺ below. The couple leapt up in a panic, took the one blanket they had, and mopped the floor with their hands so that not a single bead would fall on the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. In the morning Abu Ayyub came down trembling and pleaded again: "Messenger of Allah, it is not right for me to be above you." This time the Prophet ﷺ allowed it. They moved his belongings upstairs, and Abu Ayyub noted, almost in wonder, how little there was to move. The man who led a city owned so few possessions that shifting his whole household took hardly any effort.

Following the Messenger to the smallest detail

From then on they sent food down to the Prophet ﷺ and his family. When the dishes came back up, they would search them for the place the Prophet ﷺ had eaten from, and eat from that very spot, so that even their meal might touch where his hand had touched.

One day they sent up fresh garlic, and it came back untouched. They panicked again. The Prophet ﷺ came down, and Abu Ayyub asked, "Messenger of Allah, is this garlic forbidden?" No, he told him; it is not forbidden, but I do not like to eat it raw, for it leaves an odor, and I dislike carrying it to the mosque or when the angels come to me. Abu Ayyub's answer was instant and total: "Then I hate what you hate. From this day, I do not like garlic either." The Prophet ﷺ smiled and told him this was for him alone. But Abu Ayyub did not want a single difference between himself and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, even in what he placed on his tongue.

In that same house he witnessed one of the great miracles. He and Umm Ayyub had prepared a meal for four. The Prophet ﷺ told him to invite thirty of the Ansar, and they came and ate from it. Then sixty more. Then seventy more. By the end, Allah had fed a hundred and sixty people through His Messenger ﷺ from the food of four. For the seven months the mosque was being built, Abu Ayyub watched, up close, the blessing Allah poured through his hands.

The night three men met because they were hungry

When the mosque was finished, the Prophet ﷺ did not tell his host to find another home. The small dwellings of the Prophet's

family were built right there, and Abu Ayyub remained his neighbor, still preparing food each day and setting it out for him.

One of the most humbling scenes in all the seerah grew out of this arrangement. One night the Prophet ﷺ went out, and near the mosque he came upon Abu Bakr, and then Umar, all three drawn from their homes in the dark. "What has brought you out at this hour?" he asked. "Hunger," they said. Sit with that: the greatest man who ever lived and the two greatest men of his ummah, meeting in the night because none of them had food. The Prophet ﷺ swore that the very thing that drove them out had driven him out too, and told them to follow him.

They went to the house of Abu Ayyub. Umm Ayyub opened the door with the words, "Welcome to the Messenger of Allah," and before she could finish, Abu Ayyub came running from the palm trees where he had been working. Seeing the hour, he understood: these men were hungry. And the way his heart worked in that instant tells you everything. Not pity, not burden, but gratitude. "All praise is to Allah," he said, "no one today is more honored by his guests than I am." He hurried to his garden for the best of his dates, drew fresh water, and fetched two loaves for Umm Ayyub to bake. Then he went to slaughter a young goat. The Prophet ﷺ told him not to exhaust himself, not to kill a milking animal in his haste, but Abu Ayyub insisted; this was his opportunity, and he would not let it pass.

When the food was set before him, the Prophet ﷺ took the bread, laid a piece of meat inside it, and told Abu Ayyub to carry a portion to his daughter Fatima, "for she has not seen the likes of this for days." Only after she was cared for did he eat. And as he sat among his companions, he named the blessings aloud, bread, meat, ripe dates, cool water, things his household so

rarely saw that Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) would later say months passed with nothing baked in their oven. And the Prophet ﷺ wept. He swore to Abu Bakr and Umar that they would be asked about this blessing on the Day of Judgment. So begin with the name of Allah, he told them, and when you finish, say: all praise belongs to Allah who has filled us and bestowed His bounty upon us. This was not to make them feel guilt but to teach them gratitude, for he had taught before that whoever wakes secure in his home, healthy in body, with food enough for the day, it is as though the whole world has been gathered for him. Abu Ayyub was the man Allah placed in the position to feed His Messenger ﷺ in moments like these, and to feed our hearts a lesson in thankfulness.

The one whose words Allah wrote into the Qur'an

Because he was the host of the Prophet ﷺ, Abu Ayyub came to be seen as a kind of caretaker of the mosque. To him belongs a striking first: he was the first to throw a hypocrite out of it. The Prophet ﷺ would patiently ignore their sneering, but one day Abu Ayyub heard them mocking him inside the mosque itself, and he could not contain himself. He lifted the man who was speaking and put him out the door.

But his greatest answer to the hypocrites was not delivered with his hands. It was so perfect that Allah preserved it forever in His Book. When the slander against Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) swept through the city, passed from mouth to mouth under the cover of curiosity, "did you hear, did you hear," Umm Ayyub came to her husband and repeated what everyone was saying. Abu Ayyub's reply was that of a believer who refuses to let a whisper become a flood. "Yes," he said, "and it is a lie." Then he turned the matter back on her: "Would you do such a thing, Umm

Ayyub?" She said, "By Allah, never." And he answered, "Then Aisha is better than you. This is a clear and obvious lie."

He was not insulting his wife. He was defending his mother, the wife of the Prophet ﷺ, saying plainly that a pure woman should be assumed pure, and that the dignity of the believers does not bend to gossip. And Allah revealed words that mirror exactly what Abu Ayyub had said:

When you heard the lie, why did believing men and women not think well of their own people and declare, 'This is obviously a lie'?

QUR'AN 24:12

In a community where some spread the slander and some merely fell silent, the one man whose instinct was recorded in revelation as the right one was Abu Ayyub. His heart had already arrived where the verse would command.

He stood by the Prophet ﷺ with his body too. Once the Prophet ﷺ found him keeping watch outside his house at night with a drawn sword, and prayed, "O Allah, protect him as he is protecting me." He was a man of Badr, the highest of ranks among those who fought, and he was at Uhud, at the Trench, and at the pledge under the tree. He never once said, let me stay behind and watch the mosque. Wherever the Prophet ﷺ went, he wanted to be at his side.

The years after, and the kindness returned

When the Prophet ﷺ passed away, Abu Ayyub did not retire into the memory of his honor. He kept going out in the path of Allah under Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman (may Allah be pleased with them). When the great trial broke out among the Muslims after

the killing of Uthman, he stood with Ali (may Allah be pleased with him), who placed him in charge of al-Madinah. Yet when that strife turned into Muslim fighting Muslim, Abu Ayyub, who had never once stayed behind from a battle, refused to fight at Siffin or the Camel. He drew his sword again only against the Khawarij. His was a restraint born not of cowardice but of conscience.

In his later years he moved from place to place, living for spells in al-Madinah, Syria, Egypt, and Iraq. One of the most tender stories of his life comes from his arrival in Basra, where the governor was Abdullah ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him), the young cousin of the Prophet ﷺ who had clung to his company as a boy. When he heard Abu Ayyub was coming, he went out to meet him and said, "I am going to repay you for how you hosted the Prophet ﷺ." He gave him the keys to his own house and everything in it, and when he learned Abu Ayyub owed some twenty thousand dinars, he gave him forty thousand. Years had passed, the Prophet ﷺ was long gone, and still the gratitude of the younger generation reached back to honor the man who had once opened his door to him. That is what love of the Prophet ﷺ does.

Wherever he settled, the same trait followed him: he loved the mosque, attended every prayer, and quietly took up the role of its caretaker and its conscience. He would correct an official who differed from the Prophet's practice with a single sentence: "I saw the Messenger of Allah ﷺ pray with my own eyes. When you agree with him, we follow you. When you differ from him, we will not." It was not arrogance, but a man carrying what he had witnessed and refusing to let it be altered, who would rather err on the side of honoring Allah than risk the smallest disrespect.

A grave at the edge of the world

His death was as remarkable as his life. Under the reign of Muawiyah, an aged Abu Ayyub, now in his eighties, joined the army that marched against the Romans at Constantinople, the prize the Prophet ﷺ had foretold would one day belong to the Muslims. The man who had hosted the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in his home now traveled to the farthest point the Muslims had ever reached, because he wanted to be as close as possible to the place his Prophet had promised.

He did not fall to a wound; he fell ill. And as death approached, he gave his companions an instruction: "Take me to the furthest point you can reach, and when you face the enemy, bury me there, beneath your feet." Then he told them he had one more hadith to share, the last of the roughly fifty he carried from the Prophet ﷺ. "Were I not in this state," he said, "I would not tell you, but I do not want to keep anything from you now." Then he reported the words of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ: whoever dies without associating any partner with Allah will enter Paradise. He had withheld this hadith of pure hope lest people grow lazy, but now he wanted them to know the weight of la ilaha illa Allah. And having said it, he died upon it, leaving this world not only upon the word but giving its good news with his final breath.

They buried him at the gates of Constantinople. Centuries later, when the city fell to the Muslims, a mosque rose over his grave, and to this day an entire district of that city carries his name. He left behind one daughter, Amrah, herself a companion, and that piece of ground in al-Madinah, given for the sake of Allah, where the mosque was built upon his land, an endowment from which reward still flows to him every time a worshipper prays there.

What this life asks of our faith

It is easy to read about Abu Ayyub and feel a soft, distant warmth, to picture a kind old man who once had the good fortune to host the Prophet ﷺ and leave it there. But his life is not a pleasant anecdote. It is a question pressed against our own iman.

The honor that defined him was given, not earned by scheming. While others calculated how to gain leverage by taking the Prophet ﷺ in, he simply loved him and waited, and Allah chose him. That is the first thing his life asks: do you trust Allah to place you where you belong, or do you grasp and position yourself for what you want? The things most worth having are the things Allah assigns. Make your heart worth choosing, and leave the choosing to Him.

Then look at how he loved. He would not eat what the Prophet ﷺ disliked, though it was lawful for him. He pressed himself against a wall in the night rather than rest above the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and mopped spilled water with his bare hands in a panic of devotion. This is love that lives in the small things, and that is exactly where our love of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ is tested today. Anyone can claim great love in a great moment. The truer measure is whether you will adjust the small, private, unseen details of your life for the sake of the One you say you love.

And see what he did with the gifts of Allah. When three hungry men appeared at his door, he saw not a burden but an honor, and said so aloud. Over a simple meal the Prophet ﷺ wept and warned that we will be questioned about every such blessing. We wake each day in security, in health, with food enough, and let it pass as though it were owed to us. His life, and that night of weeping, ask us to see what is already in our hands as the bounty it truly is, and to do something with it for Allah: to feed someone, to open a door, to turn a small provision into a small

worship. The gratitude that brought the Prophet ﷺ to tears is available to you over your next ordinary meal.

Finally, hold on to the way he died. After a lifetime of nearness to the Prophet ﷺ, of battles and authority and honor, what he chose to carry to the edge of the earth and give with his last breath was the worth of la ilaha illa Allah. Not his status, not his memories, but the pure word of his Lord and the hope that whoever dies upon it will reach the Garden. That is where he placed his trust at the end, and it is where each of us must place ours. So take one thing from him into your week: love Allah and His Messenger ﷺ in something small and unseen, treat one of your daily blessings as the gift it is and spend it for His sake, and guard in your heart, above all your achievements, the worship of God alone. May Allah be pleased with Abu Ayyub al-Ansari and with his wife Umm Ayyub, reward the Ansar who loved the Prophet ﷺ as he loved him, and let us die, as he did, upon la ilaha illa Allah.

This chapter follows the account of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (24:12). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Al-Bara' ibn Malik

The Man Whose Oath Allah Honoured

There is a kind of greatness the world is built to overlook. It does not announce itself. It walks in dusty and unkempt, in two worn garments, with untidy hair and a thin pale frame, and the eyes of the people slide right past it. They see a peasant, a nobody, a man of no account. And all the while, this is a man so close to Allah that when he raises his hands and swears an oath by his Lord, Allah fulfils it.

That man was al-Bara' ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him), the older brother of Anas ibn Malik, and almost nothing of his life survives except what happened to him on the battlefield. He narrated no hadith. We know nothing of his childhood, nothing of how he came to Islam, nothing of any home or marriage. He is one of the most obscure of the famous companions, and one of the most instructive. Because what little reaches us about him answers a question every believer quietly carries: does it matter, in the sight of Allah, if no one on earth ever notices what I am?

A son of that house

To understand al-Bara', you have to remember the house he came from. He was, by the stronger opinion, the full brother of Anas ibn Malik, which means his mother was Umm Sulaym, the woman whose sacrifice for the sake of Allah was almost too much to comprehend. The spirit of that household runs straight

through him: a family that knew only one thing, to give, to sacrifice, to place itself by the side of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and ask for nothing in return.

And here is the wonder of it. Two brothers, one mother, one father, one home, and two utterly different paths to Allah. Anas was the gentle servant of the Prophet ﷺ, who would live more than seventy years after the Prophet's passing and pour out for the ummah over a thousand hadith, carrying the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in his heart and on his tongue until he died an old man. Al-Bara' was a warrior who lived for the next battle and seemed to have little to say in any gathering. There is no record of him raising his voice among the companions. He was, it was said, a man who knew almost only two words: Allah, and Jannah. One book describes the whole of his inner life in a single line: I love Allah, and I want Paradise. That was the man, complete.

We are not all cut from one cloth. The companions of the Prophet ﷺ were men and women of every temperament, and their roads to greatness ran in every direction. One brother became a fountain of knowledge. The other became a sword in the path of Allah. Both came from the same mother, and both, by the mercy of their Lord, came home.

The man no one should belittle

The first time al-Bara' appears at all is at the Battle of Uhud. He was, it seems, too young for Badr. But from Uhud onward he is in every single battle, and he becomes known for one thing above all: his presence on the field of war. He was among those who gave the Pledge of al-Ridwan under the tree, the pledge about which Allah revealed His pleasure with the believers who stood there. He was among the small handful who did not flee at Hunayn but held their ground beside the Prophet ﷺ when the

rest scattered. On the journeys he was the one who would sing to the camels to keep them moving, for he had a beautiful voice, and the animals knew his tune.

Listen to how he was described, because the description is the whole point. He was extremely short and extremely thin, so thin that they said there was nothing on his bones to pinch. His clothes were dusty, his hair was wild, he owned two garments and spoke very little. He was pale, and he was not handsome. When people looked at him, they belittled him. They thought him a man of no weight in the world.

And it was precisely this man, out of all the thousands of companions, whom the Prophet ﷺ named as the living example of a hadith that should make every one of us stop and breathe slowly. There are people, the Prophet ﷺ said, who are dishevelled and covered in dust, turned away from the doors of others, owning almost nothing, to whom no one pays the slightest attention, who are pushed aside as though they were nothing at all, and yet who have reached such a station with Allah that if one of them were to swear an oath by Allah, Allah would fulfil it for him. Their nearness to Allah is so complete that when they say, "O Allah, I ask You for this," Allah gives it, because of where they stand with Him.

The Prophet ﷺ pointed to al-Bara' as one such man.

On another occasion the Prophet ﷺ taught the same lesson from the other side. A noble, impressive man passed by, and the companions said: this is a man of honour; if he speaks we listen, if he intercedes his intercession is accepted, if he proposes for marriage he is given. Then a poor, unremarkable man passed by, and they said: this one is nothing; if he speaks no one listens, if he intercedes no one cares, if he proposes he will be refused.

And the Prophet ﷺ said that this poor man, the one they had just dismissed, was better in the sight of Allah than an earth full of the first.

This is not a small lesson tucked into a battle story. It is a warning about how we measure people, and therefore about how we measure ourselves. We assign rank by what is visible: by wealth, by beauty, by strength, by the polish of a person's speech. Allah assigns rank by what is in the heart, hidden from every eye but His. Al-Bara' had nothing the Arabs valued. His enemies looked at his small frame and underestimated him on the battlefield, again and again, to their ruin. His own society would have tossed him aside. And he was, by the testimony of the Prophet ﷺ himself, one of the beloved of Allah, a man whose word with his Lord carried more weight than the standing of the proudest noble in the land.

Thrown over the wall

Everything we know of al-Bara' is from the field, and his most famous stand came at the Battle of Yamamah, against Musaylimah the Liar.

It is worth pausing on what Yamamah was. Musaylimah was a false prophet who had risen in the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ and grown bold after his passing. He did not merely claim prophethood; he murdered viciously, slaughtering whole caravans of those who refused to acknowledge him. He came from Banu Hanifah, who out of sheer tribal pride followed him, saying the liar of their tribe was dearer to them than the truthful one of Quraysh. This was the enemy. And the battle was so costly, so many bearers of the Qur'an fell in it, that it set in motion the gathering of the Qur'an into a single written record, lest the deaths of the memorisers leave the ummah exposed.

The Muslims under Khalid ibn al-Walid drove Musaylimah's forces back until they retreated into a walled garden so deadly that it earned a grim nickname: the Garden of Death. Twenty thousand of them were inside. The walls held, arrows and stones poured down, and no one could get in. The battle hung in the balance.

It was here that al-Bara' made his offer. He went to the commander and said, in effect: I am small. Strap me to a shield, and catapult me over the wall, and I will open the gate from the inside. Let me reach the gate, kill the guards, and throw it open so all of you can storm in.

To anyone sensible it sounded like suicide. It was reckless beyond reason. But al-Bara' did not care. Throw me at them, he said. So they tied him to a shield, and they flung him over the wall of the Garden of Death, into the midst of twenty thousand enemies.

And it worked. He landed among them, and with surprise on his side, for who expects a man to drop from the sky, he killed the guards, fought his way to the gate, and threw it open. The Muslims poured in. But he was not finished. Musaylimah had a personal bodyguard, a giant of a man so feared that he was nicknamed the Donkey of Yamamah. While Musaylimah himself cowered at the very back, the way of cowards, with our Prophet ﷺ always at the front, al-Bara' walked up to that champion and cut him down. That opening let Wahshi hurl the same spear that had once killed Hamza, this time into Musaylimah. Wahshi, who had repented and become a Muslim, would say afterward: I killed the best of men with this spear, and I killed the worst of men with it. With one I sinned, and with the other I sought to wipe the sin away.

Al-Bara' did not walk out of that garden unharmed. They counted more than eighty wounds on his body, about half from arrows and half from swords. The man was cut to pieces, and somehow he lived. The victory at Yamamah was attributed to him, and Khalid ibn al-Walid himself stayed by his side for an entire month, nursing his wounds and tending to him, in honour of what he had done.

The soldier they would not make a general

Here is one of the most surprising turns in his whole story, and one of the most quietly profound.

When Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) became the leader of the believers, you might expect him to put a warrior like this at the head of an army. Instead, Umar wrote to all his governors a clear instruction: do not appoint al-Bara' as a commander over any of the armies of the Muslims. Why? Because, Umar said, he will get people killed. His courage was so total, so without limit, that as a commander he would project his own recklessness onto everyone behind him, and lead them to destruction. A general has to be a strategist. He has to be patient, to slow down, to weigh the lives in his care. Al-Bara' had only one speed. He simply charged.

But notice what Umar did not say. He did not insult al-Bara'. He did not diminish his standing with Allah. He praised him in the very same breath and said: keep using him. As a soldier, he is the best you could ever have. Only do not put him in command, because that is not where he belongs.

There is wisdom here worth carrying for a lifetime. Being a righteous person, even a beloved-of-Allah person, does not make you suited to every role. The genius of the Prophet ﷺ and of

those who came after him was that they placed people where their gifts actually fit, and did not burden them with positions they were not made for, however sincere or pious they were. To honour someone is not to hand them every responsibility. It is to set them where they will flourish, and where others will be safe.

"Do you think I will die in my bed?"

The battles ran on, against the Persians now, in the campaigns that decided the fate of empires. Al-Bara' never lost. The Muslims came to understand that when he was on the field, they would not be defeated. At Qadisiyyah, the hardest battle they ever fought against the empires, where companions died in the hundreds, the soldiers would come to him in the thick of it and say: swear an oath upon your Lord, make du'a for victory, for we know your du'a is answered. And this small, dusty man, slicing his way through the field, would lift his hands. At the conquest of Bahrain he cut down the Persian commander Marzuban and the elite warriors around him single-handedly, accounting for so much of the enemy that the leaders had to make special arrangements when dividing the spoils. He never did any of it for spoils. It was simply how Allah had made him.

His brother Anas tells of a moment that opens a window into the man's heart. Anas once came in upon him when it looked as though he were dying, and found him singing the songs of war, reciting lines of battle poetry, recounting the fields he had fought on. A dying man, Anas thought, and so he leaned in gently and said: my brother, Allah has given you something better than this to recite in such a moment. Why not read the Qur'an? And al-Bara' looked at him with complete certainty and said: you think I am going to die here, on my bed? No. By Allah, Allah will not deprive me of martyrdom in the battlefield. I have overcome more

than a hundred men by my own hand, not counting those I fought alongside the Prophet ﷺ. Allah is not going to take that death away from me. And he healed, and he returned to the field.

His last battle was at Tustar, against the Persians, and the Muslims were on the edge of defeat. They called out to him: al-Bara', swear an oath upon your Lord, for He answers you. So he raised his hands: O Allah, I ask You for victory, turn their backs to us. The Muslims pushed forward, then were beaten back. A second time they called to him, and a second time he prayed. And then, the third time, something in him shifted, and his du'a changed. O Allah, he said, I ask You for victory, and let me join Your Prophet. In the middle of the fight, his heart had turned toward the Messenger of Allah ﷺ whom he missed, and he was asking now for two things at once: that his brothers be given the victory, and that he himself be taken to the company of the Prophet ﷺ.

Allah gave him both.

The last thing he ever did

The end of his story is the most beautiful thing in it, and it has nothing to do with his own glory.

The Persians at Tustar had a cruel device: hooks of burning iron, which they threw over the walls to catch the Muslims and drag them back, so that a man would die from the heat of the metal, or from the wound of the hook, or be killed when he was hauled across. Anas was there beside his brother, and Anas was caught. One of the burning hooks took hold of him, and he was being pulled toward death.

And al-Bara' threw himself onto his brother and pulled the burning iron off him with his own two bare hands. He held that

searing metal and unhooked Anas until there was nothing left on his palms, until his hands were destroyed, to save his brother's life. And shortly after that, al-Bara' was killed. The Muslims won the battle, exactly as he had asked. He was given the martyrdom he had asked for, and he went to join the Prophet ﷺ he had longed for. And the last image Anas ibn Malik ever carried of his older brother was of him burning his own hands to the ruin to pull him out of death.

Stop and weigh what happened in that instant. This was only about twenty years after the Hijrah. Anas was perhaps thirty years old, and would live more than seventy years more. Every one of the thousand-plus hadith he would one day narrate, the whole vast inheritance of the Prophet's words and ways that reaches us through Anas, all of it hung on a single split-second decision made by a man with no fame and no narrations of his own. Al-Bara' had a heartbeat in which to choose, and he chose to save his brother. Without that choice, a great river of the Sunnah might never have reached us.

So when we speak of the underestimated, the unsung, the overlooked, here is what we owe to one dusty man no one thought much of. His stand at Yamamah helped preserve the Qur'an. His burning hands at Tustar preserved the life of the man who would carry the Sunnah to us for seventy years. Every time we say, "Anas reported from the Prophet ﷺ," we are in his debt.

God was pleased with the believers when they swore allegiance to you [Prophet] under the tree: He knew what was in their hearts and so He sent tranquillity down to them and rewarded them with a speedy triumph

QUR'AN 48:18

What al-Bara's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel only the thrill of it, the catapult and the eighty wounds and the bodyguard cut down. But the battlefield is not really the lesson. The lesson is what was inside the man while the world looked away, and that is something an ordinary person, who will never lift a sword, can take straight into an ordinary life.

Begin with how Allah sees. Al-Bara' was, to every eye in his society, a nobody: small, poor, plain, silent, dressed in two worn garments, the kind of man whose presence registers on no one. And he was, by the word of the Prophet ﷺ himself, among the beloved of Allah, a man whose oath the Lord of the worlds would honour. Hold those two facts together, because they are meant to break something in you, the habit of measuring yourself and others by what shows. You do not know which quiet, unremarkable believer standing near you is precious to Allah. You do not know it about the worshipper you overlook, and you do not know it about yourself. So stop ranking souls by what the world can see, and stop despairing because the world has not ranked you highly. The only ledger that matters is kept where no eye reaches.

Then ask where al-Bara's nearness came from, because the Prophet ﷺ gave us the answer. Such people, he said, are often silent and unassuming precisely because they are so protective of their relationship with Allah, so taken up with their private conversation with their Lord that conversation with people no longer satisfies them. The more a heart enjoys speaking to Allah, the less it needs to be heard by anyone else. That is a door open to every one of us. You will not be catapulted over a wall. But you can be the believer whose richest hours are the ones no one sees: the du'a whispered in the dark, the prayer no one knows

you prayed, the closeness with Allah you do not advertise and do not need anyone to witness. That is the soil al-Bara's certainty grew in, and it is available in any home, on any ordinary night.

And learn his certainty itself. "Do you think I will die in my bed?" was not arrogance; it was a heart so sure of Allah's promise that it had stopped fearing the things people fear. He wanted Jannah, he said it plainly, and he trusted his Lord with the rest. Most of us hedge. We half-believe, we keep one hand on the world in case Allah's promise is slow. Al-Bara' put both hands in Allah's. That is what real tawakkul looks like: to act with everything you have and leave the outcome entirely to Him, content with whatever He decrees, unafraid of loss because the only thing you truly want cannot be taken from you. Bring that to one fear in your own life this week, one worry you have been clutching, and hand it to Allah the way he did.

Last, look at his hands. The final act of a life full of dramatic deeds was not dramatic at all. It was a man burning his own palms to save someone he loved, and then dying, with no audience to applaud, no narration to record his bravery in his own voice. He did it for the sake of his brother and for the sake of Allah, and it turned out to be the most consequential thing he ever did, though he could not have known it. This is the promise that should reshape how you spend your days: the deed done quietly, for Allah, costing you something, is never wasted, even when no one sees it. Allah sees it. Allah keeps it. The smallest sincere good you do today, for Him, expecting nothing back, may be the thing that weighs heaviest when the world has long forgotten it.

So take one quality of his and make it yours. Be the believer who is content to be unseen, who guards a private nearness to Allah

more carefully than any reputation, who trusts His promise enough to stop being afraid, and who does good for His sake alone. Pray a prayer tonight that no one will ever know about. Give something, or forgive someone, or carry a burden for another, and tell Allah it is for Him and tell no one else. That is how a man the world dismissed became beloved to the Lord of the worlds. May Allah be pleased with al-Bara' ibn Malik, honour us as He honoured his oath, and gather us with the brothers who burned their hands for one another in the company of the Prophet ﷺ.

This chapter follows the account of al-Bara' ibn Malik (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (48:18). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Ubadah ibn al-Samit

A Man Equal to a Thousand Men

There is a kind of man who never wants to be in charge, and who is therefore put in charge again and again. He pushes the burden away, and the people press it back into his hands, because they have looked at him and decided they trust no one else with it. Ubadah ibn al-Samit (may Allah be pleased with him) was that man. A chief before Islam, he became one of the very first of his city to believe. He wrote down the revelation as it descended. He memorized the whole of it. He negotiated the treaties, collected the charity, judged the disputes, and led the armies, not because he reached for any of it, but because every time a heavy trust appeared, the believers turned to him and said, it is you.

To begin to understand him, you have to meet the city he came from, and the night a small group of strangers found something in Makkah they had not known they were looking for.

A chief of Khazraj who went looking for light

Ubadah was a leader of the tribe of Khazraj, one of the two great tribes of Yathrib, the city that would one day be called Madinah. His father had been a leader before him and had died in the wars that tore that city apart, and so leadership fell to Ubadah early. His mother was a woman of the city. Everything about his standing should have rooted him in the old ways.

But Yathrib was bleeding. A long civil war had killed off so many of its senior men that the survivors were left dazed, looking for a way out of the madness. Many historians say this is exactly why a small group of its leaders came to Makkah during the season of pilgrimage. They did not fully know why they had come. There was an aura around Makkah, a sense that this was a place where a person might seek inspiration and find some good. And there, instead of an idol, they found the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Ubadah was among them. He took the first pledge, the one the Arabs called the pledge of the women, not because women were present, but because it carried no military commitment, and in their custom only the men bore arms. Twelve men gave that pledge and went home to spread Islam through their city. A year later, more than seventy returned, and Ubadah was among them again for the second pledge, the one in which they swore to defend the Prophet ﷺ with their lives. So he was one of the few who gave both pledges, who stepped twice across the line that separated the old world from the new.

His first pledge was a list of plain commitments, and Ubadah narrated it himself. They pledged that they would worship none beside Allah, that they would not steal, that they would not commit unlawful intimacy, that they would not kill their children, that they would not slander the innocent, and that they would not disobey in what was right. Before the laws were detailed, before the prayer took its final shape, this was the moral foundation handed to a people to carry home: leave the idols, leave theft, leave indecency, leave the burying of your children, leave the lie that destroys a reputation, and obey in goodness. In another narration he added that they pledged to hear and obey in ease and in hardship, in eagerness and in fatigue, to stand firm upon the truth, and never to fear the blame of the blamers.

Everything about him was prominent

Through Ubadah's siblings, his first wife, and his son the faith spread; all of them entered Islam through him. And the descriptions of the man himself are vivid. He came from the black Yemenis, distinguished, the narrators are careful to note, from the people of Abyssinia; he was of Yemen, and exceedingly dark of skin. He was very tall. They said everything about him was prominent: his forehead, his hair, his nose, his eyes, all of it striking, and he was exceedingly handsome. But there was something else. When he walked into a room, whoever saw him was overtaken at once by both admiration and a kind of fear. He had the imposing presence of a chief, the sort of man to whom a room yields without a word being spoken.

He was praised for his beauty and his eloquence, for his knowledge and his wisdom. He was the man people came to when a truce needed negotiating, the one everyone could sit across from at the table. He accompanied the Prophet ﷺ in every battle, beginning with Badr, which is a nobility all its own. He was among the small number whom the Prophet ﷺ entrusted to write the revelation as it came down. And he was among the rarest of all: one of the very few who memorized the entire Qur'an in the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ, when even among the senior leaders that was uncommon.

But the picture that stays with you is not any single title. It is the combination. In times of peace, he was the most patient of teachers, sitting in the mosque with the homeless and the new arrivals, going from one to another, teaching them the Qur'an word by word while others brought them food and water. He was the wisest of men at the negotiating table. At night he was an ascetic like no other, a worshipper who wept and gave himself to his Lord in the dark. And in battle he was a lion you did not want

to be anywhere near. Worshipper, scholar, diplomat, warrior, all in one frame. That is a rare thing in any age.

The man who did not want to be appointed

When the persecuted believers began to flee Makkah for Madinah, that fragile city needed somewhere to put them. Ubadah was one of the main people who set up the shelters, gathering a group of companions to host the migrants as they arrived, before turning to help arrange the migration of the Prophet ﷺ himself. When treaties had to be drawn up with the Jewish tribes of Madinah, the Prophet ﷺ entrusted Ubadah, of all people, to negotiate them. When the charity needed collecting, the Prophet ﷺ appointed him to that too.

And here something tender shows itself. The Prophet ﷺ said to him, fear Allah regarding this wealth, for it is the charity of the people; do not take any of it for yourself, and know that whatever you take of it will come on the Day of Judgment as a testimony against you. Ubadah said he began to tremble when he heard those words. From that day, he said, he wished never again to be appointed over anyone, never to be responsible for two people, never to be put in charge of anyone's money.

This is the quiet engine of his whole life. The more he tried to push these positions away, the more Allah kept placing them upon him, because a man of that integrity could not be left aside. His nobility was so plain that people kept saying, no, it must be you, it must be you, and he kept trying to step back, and they kept thrusting him forward. He did not chase leadership; he carried it, the way a person carries something heavy they would rather set down, because they know what will happen if they do.

A man worth a thousand men

The title comes from Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), and Umar was not a man who was easily impressed. When Umar praised someone, people took it seriously, because it meant the man had something exceptional in him. Reinforcements were needed for the campaigns against the Romans, and Umar sent Ubadah. He wrote a note and told him to give it to the general. The note said, in effect: this man I am sending you is worth a thousand men; keep him at your side, and victory will come at his hand.

And it did, again and again. Ubadah would go out, victory would come, and he would return and set up shop once more as a judge among the people, a wise man they came to, a teacher of the Qur'an, consulted in the most pivotal moments. After the Prophet ﷺ passed away he served as a judge under Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), and as a military leader who fought battle after battle and helped establish cities. He even had a gift for architecture; he could plan and build, and many of the famous mosques left behind were laid out by him, so that people would return to him when it was time to construct a place of worship.

His marriage carried its own testimony. He married a widow who had lost husband and son and brother in one of the early battles, and she would later praise him for the way he treated the son she had brought from her former marriage. A wife's testimony to her husband's character is no small thing, and hers was warm.

When the governor of greater Syria wrote to Madinah, the issue was teachers. People were entering Islam in great numbers, freely, for there was no forced conversion. But these new believers were fresh in the faith and needed someone to teach them the Qur'an, the lawful and the forbidden, the religion itself. They needed the source. The companions loved Madinah and

were reluctant to leave it. So Ubadah gathered the five from the Ansar who were the authorities of the Qur'an and said three of them must go. They settled it among themselves without any lottery: one was too elderly, one too ill, and so three were sent, and Ubadah went to Palestine with his wife.

The encounter at the gates of Egypt

He became, in Palestine, almost a school of Qur'an unto himself. He produced reciters who produced reciters, and a culture of memorization took root there that traced its chain back, through him, to the Prophet ﷺ. To this day there are people of that land whose connection to the Qur'an runs through Ubadah ibn al-Samit.

But the scene that captures the man best happened at the gates of Egypt. The Muslims had laid siege to the fortress of Babylon in the year 641. The Roman ruler of Egypt, the Muqawqis, was at once the political governor and the head of the church, the last of the Byzantine rulers there. Before the fighting came the diplomacy, and the Muslims sent Ubadah forward to speak. Amr ibn al-As led the overall campaign, but Ubadah was one of his chief generals, and it was Ubadah who stepped out to negotiate.

The Muqawqis looked at him and could not make sense of what he saw. A man this dark could not, in his world, be a leader. Take this black man away, he said, and bring me someone else to speak with. He would not even address him. He spoke instead to the men behind him, asking who was really in charge.

What the companions said in reply is one of the most beautiful answers in our history. This man you have just degraded, they told him, is the best of us. He is our leader, the most knowledgeable among us, and we say nothing except what he

says; we return everything to his word. The Muqawqis pressed them: how could you allow a black man to be the best of you? He should be the least of you. And again they answered: he is the best of us, our leader, our commander. And to us, they said, black and white are the same. No one is superior except by piety. That is the only ladder we climb.

Bewildered, the ruler finally turned to Ubadah himself, still calling him by his color, and told him to speak softly and keep his distance, because his appearance frightened him. Ubadah smiled. If you fear me, he said, know that there are a thousand black men behind me, every one as dark as I am, and they will frighten you just as much. What do you want, the ruler asked, refusing to be drawn further. And Ubadah, an old man now, his youth long gone, answered: you may fear me, but by Allah, I would not fear a hundred of your best soldiers at once, and neither would my companions, who all carry the same courage. We do not fight you for wealth or for this world. None of us wants a single coin of it beyond what wards off hunger and clothes the body; anything more is surplus, and we are content with what Allah has given us. Our pleasure is the pleasure of Allah.

The Muqawqis turned to those around him, shaken. Have you ever heard people speak like this, he asked. I feared his appearance, but what he has said alarms me far more than his face. These were people whose values, whose conviction, whose courage were simply of a different order. Ubadah led that army to a swift victory, and went on to help develop Egypt, building there the first mosque, in the first capital of that land. The dignity he carried into that meeting was not pride. It was the calm of a man who had nothing to protect because he had given everything to Allah, and so there was nothing left in him for a king to threaten.

The last day, rolled out before his house

There was an argument, once, with the governor of Syria, a sharp human dispute, and Ubadah turned up suddenly back in Madinah. Umar, who did not like to leave a community uncovered, could have been severe. Instead he asked gently what had happened, and when Ubadah explained, Umar said something that tells you how those companions understood blessing: may Allah disgrace a land that has no man like you in it. What good is a place that you, or someone like you, are not in. He sent Ubadah back, but with words he gave to no one else: no one is appointed over you; you are your own man, accountable to Allah and to yourself. The righteous, they understood, are a source of protection and blessing wherever they are, and a land grows vulnerable when it loses them.

Then came the end. He had retired again to Palestine, and after his wife died on the shore of Cyprus, accepted as a martyr just as the Prophet ﷺ had foretold, he did not live long. When death drew near, he did something extraordinary. He asked his family to carry him out and lay him in the courtyard before his house, and to call every single person he had ever dealt with: a servant, a soldier, a neighbor, a family member, anyone who had ever entered upon him. They gathered around their dying leader.

This day of mine, he said, I see it to be the last of my days in this world and the first of my nights in the hereafter. Then he said: I may have wronged one of you with my hand or with my tongue. I do not know who. But if I have, then on the Day of Judgment Allah will take your right from me. So come forward now, while my soul is still in my body, and take your justice from me before I go.

Not one person came forward. Instead they began to praise him. You were like a father to us. We never heard a single harmful word from your mouth. You have nothing to answer for. He pressed them, and still no one had any claim. So he said: O Allah, bear witness that not a single one of them had a complaint against me. And he died that day. Think of what that means. Here was a man with a lifetime of accomplishment, and the thing he feared at the threshold of death was not whether he had achieved enough, but whether he had hurt someone with a careless word.

His very last narration came on that deathbed. A man entered upon him as he was dying and began to weep, and Ubadah asked him why. Stop crying, he said. If I die a martyr, I will intercede for you; if I am given any good standing on that Day, I will be there for you. Everything I learned from the Prophet ﷺ that could benefit you, I have already taught you. But there is one hadith left, and I will give it to you now, near my death. I heard the Prophet ﷺ say: whoever bears witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, Allah has forbidden the Fire for him. He had held it back all his life, the way another companion held back the same hadith until his own dying hour, so that people would not grow complacent and stop striving. But at the end, with nothing left to guard against, he let the mercy of it pour out. And moments later he passed away, and was buried in Palestine, among many of the companions, where his descendants live to this day.

What Ubadah's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel only awe, to file him away as a giant we could never resemble. That would waste him. His

life is not a statue to admire from below. It is a question put to our own iman.

Start with the thing he feared most. A man who had written the Qur'an with his own hand and carried armies to victory lay dying, and his one anxiety was whether his tongue or his hand had wounded someone he had forgotten. He did not measure himself by his conquests. He measured himself by whether he had harmed a single servant. You may never lead an army or memorize the whole Book, but you can aspire to exactly this: to live so that on the day you meet Allah, no one you ever dealt with could honestly say that you hurt them. Ask whether the people under your authority, your children, your employees, the strangers you are short with, would have a complaint to bring. That is a goal open to anyone, and it is closer to the heart of faith than any title.

Then look at how he held position. Every honor was forced on him; he kept trying to set it down. He trembled at the charity because he understood that authority over people and over wealth is not a prize but a trust he would answer for. We tend to want the standing without the reckoning. He wanted neither, and was given both, and carried them as a man who knew his Lord was watching the ledger. If Allah has placed anything in your hands, a household, a team, a little money that is not yours, the question his life asks is whether you hold it as a trust you fear to misuse, or as a possession you are proud to own.

And look at the gates of Egypt. A king tried to shame him for his skin, tried to imagine he could be bribed, and found a man who could not be moved, because Ubadah's worth was not in his appearance or his comfort; it was in the pleasure of Allah, and that no one could take from him. We are kept timid and small by

our attachments, by what people think of us, by the coins we are afraid to lose. He had set all of that down and so he stood before an empire unafraid. The more of yourself you place with Allah, the less the world has left to threaten. That is the secret of his courage, and it is available to you the moment you stop needing what the world is holding over your head.

So take one thing from him into an ordinary day. Guard your tongue with one person you usually wound, and mean it for Allah. Hold whatever you have been entrusted with, even something small, as a trust you will be asked about, and act accordingly. And when you fear losing the world's approval or the world's coin, remember that a content heart that wants only the pleasure of Allah cannot be bought and cannot be frightened. That is how a man becomes worth a thousand men: not by strength, but by giving himself so completely to his Lord that nothing else can purchase him. May Allah be pleased with Ubadah ibn al-Samit, grant us a measure of his courage and his fear of harming others, and gather us with the companions who feared no blame but His.

This chapter follows the account of Ubadah ibn al-Samit (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Umm Haram bint Milhan

The Martyr of the Sea

There is a kind of faith that does not ask how. It hears a promise, believes it, and then spends the rest of its life quietly walking toward it, never once demanding to know the road. Umm Haram bint Milhan (may Allah be pleased with her) had that faith. One ordinary afternoon, sitting in her home in Madinah among people who had never seen the open sea, she heard the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ describe a vision of believers crossing the water like kings, and she asked him to pray that she would be among them. She was already past middle age. There was no navy. There were no ships. There was no reason on earth to think it could ever happen. She asked anyway. And decades later, on a far island her people could barely have imagined, the promise found her.

To understand the weight of that, you have to meet the family she came from, because the whole household carried the same rare trait.

A family that loved to be near him

When the series began, it dwelt on the qualities of the Ansar, and on one quality in particular: selflessness. Among the Ansar that selflessness ran deep, and within certain families it ran deeper still, passed down until it became the dominant trait of everyone under that roof. The family of Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be

pleased with him) was one of those families. Their love for the Prophet ﷺ was the love of the Ansar, but it was something more than that. It was, "O Messenger of Allah, we always want to be by your side. We always want to sacrifice for you." And underneath all of it ran one single, repeated prayer: O Allah, accept this from me. Sincere intention. The truthful intention of a heart that means what it says.

You see it in every branch of the family. Anas himself, who as a boy was placed in the Prophet's service by his mother and who carried the Prophet ﷺ in his dreams nearly every night for over eighty years afterward. Anas's paternal aunt, ar-Rubayyi' bint an-Nadr, who came to the Prophet ﷺ after the Battle of Badr to ask about her son al-Harithah ibn Suraqah. She told him plainly: if my son is in Paradise, I will be patient; and if he is not, I will weep for him until I can weep no more. The Prophet ﷺ answered that her son had not merely reached Paradise but had reached al-Firdaws, the highest part of it. She said, "Alhamdulillah," and walked away from the battlefield content.

You see it in Anas's uncle, Anas ibn an-Nadr, who had missed Badr and never stopped grieving that he was not at the Prophet's side that day. He used to say, "If Allah gives me another chance to be with the Messenger of Allah, Allah will see what I will do." On the day of Uhud he made good on it. While the army broke and men fled for their lives, Anas ibn an-Nadr ran the other way, sword raised, calling out that he could smell Paradise coming from the direction of Uhud. He died there, and his body was so badly mutilated that only his sister, ar-Rubayyi', could identify him, by his fingertips. And you see it in Abu Talha, the righteous stepfather who married Anas's mother for a dowry of nothing but Islam, and who fought beside the Prophet ﷺ for the rest of his life. When he heard the verse that no one attains true

righteousness until he gives from what he loves, he gave away his most beloved garden in Madinah that very moment.

This was the air Umm Haram breathed. Sincere intention was not a thing she had to learn. It was the language of her whole house.

The sister, and the name

Umm Haram bint Milhan was the elder sister of Umm Sulaym, and like her sister she was known not by a son of her own but by the kunya of a younger brother. Umm Sulaym was named for her younger brother Sulaym; Umm Haram was named for her younger brother Haram. They had each been like a mother to their siblings, and the names recorded it. The whole maternal side of this family entered Islam, and Umm Haram entered it early, alongside her husband and her elder son.

She held a station almost no one else held. Through nursing, she and her sister were considered maternal aunts to the Prophet ﷺ, which made him a mahram to them. Being the older of the two, Umm Haram was treated by the Prophet ﷺ with the particular tenderness a nephew shows toward an aunt. He visited her home often. He would eat what she cooked, recline near her in a gathering, take his rest under her roof. When people asked the Prophet ﷺ about his closeness to these two women, he said simply that it was a form of mercy, and that their brothers had been killed alongside him.

That last phrase carries the whole story. Because before Umm Haram was given anything, she was asked to give a great deal.

The day she walked toward Uhud

She had married a man named Amr ibn Qays, and they had two sons, Qays and Abdullah. When she accepted Islam, her husband

and her teenage son Qays accepted it too, and quickly. The baby, Abdullah, was born into the faith. And almost at once, both her husband and her elder son joined the ranks of the Ansar who fought at Badr and became veterans of that small, beloved company.

Then came Uhud. Uhud broke Madinah. Every home in the city lost someone. And Umm Haram was tested with something only a handful of people were ever tested with: she lost her husband and her son on the same field, on the same day.

After the battle, the women came out toward the battlefield to find their dead. Most were searching for a husband, or a father. Very few were searching for both a husband and a son. Umm Haram walked toward Uhud calmly, stopping the men streaming away from it. "What happened to my husband?" she kept asking. "What happened to my husband?" One of them stopped. Was her husband Amr ibn Qays? Yes. He died a martyr. She lowered her head and said, "Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un," to Allah we belong and to Him we return. Then she kept walking, and began asking about her son. "What happened to my son? What happened to my son?" Again a man stopped. Was her son Qays ibn Amr? Yes. He too had been killed. And again she said, "Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un," and she sat down, and she grieved, but she did not break.

It is hard to convey how extraordinary that composure was at that moment in history. The wailing of the pre-Islamic Arabs, the striking of the cheeks, the screaming and the loud poetry of grief, had not yet been forbidden. It was only prohibited after Uhud. So for a woman who had just learned, in the space of a few breaths, that her husband and her firstborn were both dead, and who was now left holding a baby boy, to answer with nothing but words of

submission to Allah, was something the other companions noticed and remembered. She did not pretend she felt no pain. She was human and she grieved. But her grief never argued with her Lord.

And this was only the beginning.

Brother, like a son

There was still Haram, her younger brother, the one she had raised, the one whose name she carried. Haram ibn Milhan had been among the very earliest of the family to accept Islam, even before his sisters. He was one of the qurra', those who memorized whatever had been revealed of the Qur'an, and Anas describes him as a young man who studied the Qur'an by day and stood with it in prayer by night. He belonged to a group of devout youths who would come to the mosque each morning, draw water, and bring food to the poor who had no one. The Prophet ﷺ loved them. He fought at Badr, and he fought at Uhud.

Four months after Uhud, a delegation came from Najd asking the Prophet ﷺ to send teachers, reciters of the Qur'an, to instruct their people who wished to learn the religion. The Prophet ﷺ was cautious, but they gave him assurances, and so he sent seventy of the best of the companions, seventy memorizers of the Book. At a place called Bi'r Ma'unah, all seventy were ambushed and killed. The same number who had fallen at Uhud fell here, in a single act of treachery, four months later. Haram ibn Milhan was one of them.

When the spear struck him, Haram looked up and said, "Fuztu wa Rabb al-Ka'bah," I have succeeded, by the Lord of the Ka'bah. The man who had killed him was bewildered: what could the dying man possibly mean? But Haram had already seen what

awaited him. A martyr is shown his place in Paradise from the very first strike, the way the believing wife of Pharaoh, Asiyah, is described as having seen her home with her Lord and laughed before the end came. Haram saw his, and called it success.

So within a span of four months, Umm Haram lost her husband, her elder son, and the younger brother she had raised like a son. Her waiting period after Uhud ended at almost the very time the news of Bi'r Ma'unah arrived. She had been emptied of nearly everyone.

The dream while she combed his hair

The Prophet ﷺ turned his attention to this woman who had given so much. Many men proposed to her, and the one whose proposal she accepted was Ubadah ibn as-Samit (may Allah be pleased with him), a chief among the Ansar, a leader of noble and almost flawless character. She praised him in the way that mattered most: he treated her surviving son, Abdullah, as his own and raised him as his own, exactly as Anas had been raised by Abu Talha. Their nobility, she was saying, was not only the nobility of the battlefield. It reached all the way into the home. Together she and Ubadah had a son, Muhammad.

It was in this season of her life that the most famous moment occurred. The Prophet ﷺ came often to her house. She would feed him, and sit with him, and enjoy his company, and he would give her his full attention. One day, after she had fed him, he lay down to rest, and she sat behind him and began combing through his hair the way they searched for lice in those days, an aunt's easy, comforting touch. He fell asleep. Then he woke, and on his face was a wide smile, the dignified laughter of the Prophet ﷺ that showed the back of his teeth, the smile of a man who had just seen something beautiful.

"What is making you laugh, O Messenger of Allah?" she asked.

He told her that a group of his ummah had just been shown to him, people going out in the path of Allah, riding upon the sea, seated like kings upon thrones. To desert people who had never set foot in a boat, who lived in tents and knew only sand, this was a vision of something they could scarcely picture. And the Prophet ﷺ named them a people of Paradise.

She did not hesitate, and she did not count the obstacles. She did not think, "But I will be an old woman by then," or "but how could a woman like me ever cross the sea." She said at once, "O Messenger of Allah, pray that Allah makes me one of them." He prayed for her, and he said, "You are among them." Then he slept again, and woke describing a second group of believers, and she asked to be counted among those too. But he told her no: she was from the first group, the ones who would travel by sea.

From that day she carried the certainty in her heart. Somehow, one day, she would be on the water.

The promise kept

The years did their slow work. Her husband Ubadah ibn as-Samit became one of the great commanders of the ummah, entrusted with one place after another under Abu Bakr and Umar, residing for a long time in Palestine. When the Muslims defeated the Byzantines, they captured fleets of ships and did not know what to do with them, for they were people of the land. Mu'awiyah asked Umar for permission to build a navy from this ummah, and Umar judged it too dangerous and refused. So the ships sat. Meanwhile, from Cyprus, the Byzantines kept launching naval raids against the Muslim coast, again and again, while the Muslims insisted they fought on land.

It was Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him), in his time, who finally gave Mu'awiyah permission to assemble the first naval fleet in the history of Islam. And the man placed in command of that first expedition to Cyprus was Ubadah ibn as-Samit, Umm Haram's husband.

In her mind, this was it. This was the dream. She told him, "I am coming with you." She was about seventy-five years old. The sea voyage was dangerous before any fighting even began, and still she insisted, and Ubadah did not refuse her. So she boarded the ship and crossed the water toward Cyprus, the very thing the Prophet ﷺ had promised her in her home a lifetime before.

There is a poignant detail. Among all the narrations she ever transmitted, the single prominent one preserved from Umm Haram is a hadith recorded by Abu Dawud about the rewards of the sea: that the one who is overcome by sickness at sea in the path of Allah has the reward of a martyr, and the one who drowns has the reward of two. Of everything she might have carried, what she carried was this, the meaning of dying upon the water for the sake of Allah.

In those days they took the horses and mules aboard with them. When the fleet reached Cyprus and the doors of the ship were opened, Umm Haram mounted her horse and came down onto the shore. The moment the horse's hooves touched the land, she was thrown, and she died at once. Under the command of her own husband, Ubadah ibn as-Samit, on the island the Prophet ﷺ had pointed her toward decades earlier, the promise was complete. She was the only companion buried there, and from that day she was given a name that the books of seerah still record: Shahidat al-Bahr, the Martyr of the Sea. Her grave was

marked, and centuries later a mosque was raised over the spot, on an island that is not even a Muslim land.

The scholars said that the Prophet ﷺ had guaranteed her sister Umm Sulaym Paradise, and had guaranteed Umm Haram both Paradise and martyrdom. Two sisters, two promises, both fulfilled.

What Umm Haram's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read this and marvel at the prophecy alone, to treat it as a wonder that happened to someone long ago and has nothing to ask of us. That would miss the whole point. The marvel is real, but it is not the lesson. The lesson is in her heart, and her heart is something we can actually have.

Notice what she did the instant she heard the Prophet's dream. She did not interrogate it. She did not measure the impossibility of an old woman crossing a sea that had not yet been crossed. She heard a promise from Allah through His Messenger ﷺ, and she said, "Make me one of them." This is the marrow of iman: to trust Allah's promise before you can see the road to it, to make your intention sincere and leave the how entirely to Him. We do the opposite by instinct. We refuse to hope for the good until we can plot every step to it, and so we never set out at all. She teaches that the sincere intention comes first, and Allah arranges the rest in His own time, even if His time is fifty years.

Notice, too, that her sincerity was never for show. She asked to be among the people of Paradise in the privacy of her own home, to a Prophet ﷺ resting after a meal, with no audience, no battlefield, no witnesses but a baby and a few of her household. The whole family was the same way. "O Allah, accept this from me," they prayed, each in his own corner, asking only that Allah

see it. That is ikhlas, and it is the rarest thing we own: to do the deed for Allah alone and be content that He has counted it, even if no human being ever does. Ask how much of what you do today is performed for the eyes of people, and how much you could quietly hand to Allah the way she did.

And notice her patience. She lost a husband, a son, and a brother in four months, and she answered each blow with words of return to Allah and never once turned bitter against His decree. Her grief was honest, but it did not argue. When loss comes to you, and it will, her life asks whether your trust in Allah is deep enough to survive the very thing you were sure you could not live without. Hers was. Her peace was never in her circumstances. It was in her Lord.

Dr. Suleiman draws the whole family back to one verse, revealed about men like Anas ibn an-Nadr who made a covenant with Allah and kept it:

There are men among the believers who honoured their pledge to God: some of them have fulfilled it by death, and some are still waiting. They have not changed in the least.

QUR'AN 33:23

Some of them, the verse says, had their promise fulfilled at once, and some waited a long time, and through it all they never changed and never wavered. Umm Haram waited decades. She heard a promise, she held to it, she did not alter, and at the end Allah completed it. Here is the part that should change how you spend an ordinary day. Nothing she gave to Allah was wasted. The world might have looked at a widow who buried her family and then died falling off a horse on a foreign shore and called it a hard, small life. Allah called it the life of a queen crowned among

the people of Paradise, shown to His Prophet ﷺ in a dream and laughed over with joy. What you give to Allah, He keeps. What you suffer for Him, He sees. The promise He made to her, He fulfilled to the letter, and He does not break His word.

So take one thing from her into your own life this week. Make one sincere intention to Allah for some good you long to do, even if you cannot yet see how it could ever happen, and ask Him for it without worrying about the road. Do one act for His sake alone that no one will ever know about. Meet one disappointment with "Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un" and refuse to let it sour your trust in Him. That is how the Martyr of the Sea lived: in certainty, in sincerity, in patience, and in a promise quietly kept. May Allah be pleased with Umm Haram, and with the whole blessed family she came from, and may He make us truthful in what we ask of Him, and gather us with those He has crowned.

This chapter follows the account of Umm Haram bint Milhan (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (33:23). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Anas ibn Malik

The Servant of the Beloved

There is no book of any weight in this religion that does not carry his name. Open a volume of tafsir, of hadith, of fiqh, of seerah, and sooner or later you arrive at the words "narrated by Anas ibn Malik." More than two thousand traditions about the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ reach us through one man, and almost all of them say a version of the same thing: I was with him, I saw him do this, I watched him in that moment, and I have never met anyone like him. He was not a general, and he fought in no great battle of the early years. His whole contribution was something quieter and, in the end, larger. For ten years he stood at the door of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ every single morning, and he never looked away.

And it began the way so many great things in this religion begin: with a mother who had nothing to give but her child, and gave him anyway.

A mother's gift

Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) was a boy of about ten when the Prophet ﷺ came to Madinah. His father had passed; he was, in the way the Arabs counted such things, an orphan. His mother was Umm Sulaim (may Allah be pleased with her), one of the first of the Ansar to give her allegiance, a woman whose home would stand right beside the apartments of the

Prophet ﷺ and who would follow him into his battles. When the Messenger of Allah ﷺ arrived, she came to him with her son at her side and said something that no other mother is recorded to have said in quite that way.

She said that there was not a single man or woman among the Ansar who had not given the Prophet ﷺ some gift, and that she had nothing to offer except this son of hers. Take him, she said, and let him serve you for as long as you wish. And then she asked for the one thing she truly wanted in return. Make dua for him, O Messenger of Allah. Pray for my son.

The Prophet ﷺ made a dua as complete as a dua can be. He asked Allah to increase Anas in wealth, to increase him in children, to lengthen his life, and to forgive his sins. Every word of it came true, and Anas would spend the rest of his long life watching it come true. He became one of the richest of the companions, with gardens that produced in ways no one could explain. He lived to count more than a hundred of his own descendants, some say closer to two hundred. He outlived nearly every other well-known companion, passing beyond a hundred years of age. And of the last part of the dua, the forgiveness of his sins, he would say in his old age that he was still waiting, still hoping for it, in the life to come.

There is a worry that can sit in a parent's heart at a moment like that. If I hand my child over to the service of this religion, what is he giving up? Some of the scholars say this is exactly why the Prophet ﷺ asked Allah to give Anas the good of this world as well as the next. The answer to the worry is that there was nothing to lose. The boy placed at the door of the Prophet ﷺ had been handed the greatest opportunity any human being has ever been offered.

Ten years at the door

For the next ten years his life had one shape. He would wake, step out of his home, and go straight to the door of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and his day would begin. When the day ended, he would leave the Prophet ﷺ at his home and return to his own. Day after day, for a decade, his first sight in the morning was the face of the Prophet ﷺ, and his constant was simply to be near him and ready to serve.

If you want to know the truth of a person, you do not ask a stranger. You ask the one who lived in his shadow, who saw him tired and pressed and unobserved. And of all the people who could have been worn down or treated carelessly, it would have been this one: a young servant, an orphan, a boy with no power to complain. Listen, then, to what the boy said when he was an old man.

He said he had never seen anyone with more beautiful character than the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He said, I served him for ten years, and he never struck me, never cursed me, never spoke a harsh word to me. He never even frowned in my face. Not once in ten years did he give me a look of displeasure.

There is a story Anas told more than any other, and it is small, which is what makes it enormous. The Prophet ﷺ sent him out on an errand. On the way, Anas came upon some other children playing, and he was a child, so he stopped and played, the way children do, and forgot what he had been sent to do. Then he looked up, and the Prophet ﷺ had come and was sitting nearby, watching him, laughing. He said, O little Anas, did you go where I told you to go? And the boy, caught, said what children say: Yes, I am on my way, O Messenger of Allah. He did not even rebuke the half-truth. Anas said that this was the whole of the Prophet's

correction: a smile, a gentle question, and nothing more. In another telling he said, I served him ten years, and he never once asked me, "Why did you do this?" or "Why did you not do that?"

Every parent who has ever lost their temper with a child reads that and is humbled. This was not even his own son. And he was treated like this for ten years.

The eyes that watched everything

Because Anas was not in a battle, his narrations are not about swords. They are about a man, seen up close, in the unremarkable hours that reveal everything. The scholars noticed something about the way the life of the Prophet ﷺ reaches us. The inner life of his household comes to us mostly through Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), who was within the home. The outer life, the visits and the journeys and the streets of Madinah, comes to us mostly through Anas, because he was the one man who walked beside the Prophet ﷺ every day for those ten years.

So it is Anas who tells us how the Prophet ﷺ looked: his height, his hair, his eyes, his teeth. He counted, on the day the Prophet ﷺ died, only seventeen grey hairs in all of his hair and beard. And it is Anas who tells us how the Prophet ﷺ loved. He said he never saw anyone more merciful to his family. He was there, holding the infant Ibrahim, the Prophet's own son, as the baby died in his father's arms, and he watched the tears of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ fall onto the small body. He walked with the Prophet ﷺ past a woman weeping at a grave, and heard him tell her to be patient, and that patience is at the first strike of grief.

He saw how the Prophet ﷺ was with children, his own and everyone's. He said the Prophet ﷺ would visit the homes of the

Ansar, and whenever he entered a house he would greet the little ones, sit with them, joke with them, pass his hand over their heads, and pray for them. The most important man in the city, walking into a home and asking where the children were, and the children running to him.

And he saw how the Prophet ﷺ was with the poor and the demanding. The narrations about people coming to ask for charity, about the treasury, come through Anas. He said no one ever asked the Prophet ﷺ for something without the Prophet ﷺ finding a way to give, or at least to promise. He watched a man interrupt the very call to prayer, seize the Prophet's shirt, and shout for help so roughly that the wives of the Prophet ﷺ were frightened, and the Prophet ﷺ simply went with the man, met his need, and returned to lead the prayer. He watched a bedouin yank so hard on the Prophet's cloak that it left a mark on the blessed neck, demanding, "Muhammad, give me from the wealth Allah gave you." And Anas said the Prophet ﷺ turned to him and laughed, and ordered that the man be given charity.

Two thousand of these, and more. And here is the thing Anas himself seems to have felt, narration after narration: not one of them makes you flinch. There is no story from Anas where you wince and think, that was harsh. Every single one makes you love the Prophet ﷺ more. Imagine being the one who carried all of them in his chest, waking to that for ten years.

Learning the science of greatness

It was not only that Anas witnessed an example. The Prophet ﷺ taught him, directly, how a person becomes good on the inside. These are among the most precious things Anas carried.

He said the Prophet ﷺ told him: Blessed is the one whose own faults keep him too busy to look at the faults of others. And he gave him an advice that Anas never forgot, addressing him the way he loved to, as a son. O my son, he said, if you are able to wake in the morning and go to sleep at night with no rancor in your heart toward anyone, then do so. And he said: that is from my way. The sunnah, he was teaching, is not only how a man looks on the outside. It is the cleaning of the heart. Whoever gives life to my way has loved me, he said, and whoever loves me will be with me in Paradise.

This is the heart of what Anas understood. Love of the Prophet ﷺ is not a feeling you announce. It is an imitation you attempt. The Qur'an had made this exact link, and the Prophet ﷺ was its living proof:

Say, 'If you love God, follow me, and God will love you and forgive you your sins; God is most forgiving, most merciful.'

QUR'AN 3:31

So Anas followed. He imitated the worship of the Prophet ﷺ until something remarkable was said about him. The companions said that if you wanted to see the prayer of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, you should look at the prayer of Anas. Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) said he had never met anyone whose prayer resembled the Prophet's the way the prayer of Anas did. And this was not only the placing of the hands or the bowing. It was deeper. Anas prayed at night until his feet swelled, the way the Prophet ﷺ had. His recitation, its measure and its tune, was as near to the Prophet's as a man could come, so that to stand behind him was to taste what it had been to stand behind the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He even tried to love the foods the

Prophet ﷺ loved, noticing at a meal how the Prophet ﷺ reached for the pumpkin in the dish, and saying afterward that from that day he never stopped loving it.

He did get to stand with the Prophet ﷺ in one great moment of allegiance. He was too young for Badr and Uhud, but he was present at the pledge beneath the tree, the pledge that Allah Himself praised:

God was pleased with the believers when they swore allegiance to you [Prophet] under the tree: He knew what was in their hearts and so He sent tranquillity down to them and rewarded them with a speedy triumph

QUR'AN 48:18

The last smile

A boy whose entire world is one man begins, early, to wonder what he will do when that man is gone. Anas asked the Prophet ﷺ the most innocent and the most revealing question. He said: O Messenger of Allah, I am your little servant. Intercede for me on the Day of Resurrection. And the Prophet ﷺ promised that he would. Then Anas, thinking like the boy who knew exactly where to find him every morning, asked: but where will I find you? The Prophet ﷺ told him to look for him at the bridge over the Fire. And if I do not find you there? Then at the scales. And if not there? Then at the great fountain. I will not be missed in one of those three places, the Prophet ﷺ told him; you will find me, and I will intercede for you.

Then came the day every companion dreaded. Anas gives us the view from outside the home, as Aisha gives us the view from within. It was a Monday. Abu Bakr was leading the prayer, and the people were lined up behind him, when the Prophet ﷺ drew

back the curtain of his apartment, which looked onto the mosque, and stood, with whatever strength was left in his sick body, and gazed at them. And then, Anas said, he smiled, and he laughed, and his face was so bright it was like a page of the Qur'an. Of all the smiles Anas had seen in all those years, that was the most beautiful. The Prophet ﷺ was looking at his ummah, lined up in prayer, still standing, still going on without him, the way a father looks at children he is about to leave, knowing they will carry it forward.

It was almost too much for them. Their heads began to turn toward him, in the prayer, drawn to catch one more glimpse of that face. Abu Bakr stepped back from the place of the imam, hoping the Prophet ﷺ would come out and lead them. But the Prophet ﷺ signaled to them to complete their prayer, and he let the curtain fall. That was the last time Anas saw him alive.

His whole story had begun with a mother pushing him forward toward a man he barely knew, and now it closed with the boy, grown, staring through a window at that man's final smile. Then Jibril came, and took the soul of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

Because Anas was counted as family through the nursing bond, he was among those who went down into the grave. He said that the day the Prophet ﷺ entered Madinah, everything in the city lit up, and the day he died, it was as though someone had turned the lights off. He said that when they had finished and lifted their hands from the body, their hearts felt strange, estranged, changed in a way they could not undo. Fatimah (may Allah be pleased with her) came to him and asked, broken with grief, how he could bear to put earth over her father's face. He had no answer. She wept, and turned away.

Eighty years of longing

Then Anas was given a gift granted, to that degree, to no one else in this history. The Prophet ﷺ had said that whoever sees him in a dream has truly seen him, for the devil cannot take his form. People spend their whole lives hoping for one such dream, holding it forever if it comes. Anas lived more than eighty years after the death of the Prophet ﷺ, and he used to swear that not a single night passed without his seeing his beloved one ﷺ in his sleep. As he said it, he would weep. Ten years he had seen him at his door; eighty more he saw him every night in his dreams.

He spent those decades doing the one thing he was made for: telling people about the Prophet ﷺ. He fought in the wars against apostasy under Abu Bakr and served as a collector of zakat, but he wanted no part of the politics and bloodshed that came later. When the trials worsened, he settled in Basra, where his wealth and his offspring kept multiplying, and he sat in the mosque, day after day, teaching the next generation about the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. The greatest scholars of that generation, Hasan al-Basri, Ibn Sirin, al-Zuhri, and well over a hundred others, sat in his circle. He had become a bridge: through his eyes, men who never saw the Prophet ﷺ could almost see him.

Even a man so beloved was not spared. In his old age, the tyrant al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf summoned him to humiliate him for having sided with the people of justice in the conflicts of the time. The Prophet ﷺ had called him "little Anas" out of love; al-Hajjaj now used the same small name to demean him, threatening to crush him and put him in his place. The aged companion, who had buried his own descendants in the massacres of those years, answered only with the words: to Allah we belong, and to Allah we return. They asked him afterward why he had not struck back, why he had not roused the disgusted crowd against the tyrant.

He said he could have spoken a single word that would have ended the man, but he held it back, fearing the blood it would unleash. He would not become the oppressor to answer the oppressor. He wrote, instead, a quiet letter to the caliph, who was shamed enough to force al-Hajjaj to come and apologize. Then Anas went back to the mosque, and back to teaching about the Prophet ﷺ.

He died at over a hundred years of age, and his was among the largest funerals anyone had seen, people coming from far away to pray over the last of the great companions, the servant of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Ibn Sirin led the prayer. Anas had made one last request. All his life he had kept what he had of the Prophet's belongings, a few hairs, a small staff, a piece of cloth, and he asked to be buried with them, the staff laid against his body, the hair placed with him in the grave. The way he liked to name himself, at the end, was this: I am the last among you who prayed toward both qiblas. The last living man who remembered turning, in prayer, first toward Jerusalem and then, by Allah's command, toward the Sacred House.

What Anas's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel that it belongs to another world, that the man who saw the Prophet ﷺ every morning had advantages we could never share. But Anas himself, when asked near the end how an ordinary person could ever hope to resemble such character, gave the answer that opens the door for all of us: we cannot be like them, but we can try, and the trying is itself the worship. The companions could not be the Prophet ﷺ, and they tried. That striving, he said, is the whole point.

So take the thing Anas was praised for most, and make it yours. He imitated the one he loved. Not the appearance only, but the inside: the long prayer, the clean heart that went to sleep with no malice in it, the tongue too busy with its own faults to chase the faults of others. This is something available to you tonight, in your own home, with no battle to fight and no audience to impress. You can pray one prayer slowly, the way you imagine he prayed it. You can go to sleep having forgiven, deliberately, the person who wronged you today, because the Prophet ﷺ called that his sunnah. You can do one act of mercy to a child, a neighbor, a stranger asking for help, the way Anas watched it done a thousand times. The Qur'an tied love of Allah directly to following His Messenger ﷺ, and the door of that following is still wide open.

And notice what Allah did with a life poured out in pure devotion. The world had nothing to offer Anas that it valued, no command, no conquest, only service. Yet Allah lengthened his years, multiplied his wealth and his children, made him the channel of two thousand teachings the whole ummah still lives by, and gave him, for eighty years, the nightly vision of the face he loved. The boy who was given away as a gift was the one who gained everything. This is the promise that should reach into your ordinary days: what you give to Allah is never lost, and the quiet life of sincere service, unseen and unrewarded by people, may be the very life He raises highest.

So believe the promise, as Anas believed it when he asked the Prophet ﷺ where to find him on the Day of Resurrection, with the certainty of a boy who knew his place was beside the one he loved. Serve for the sake of Allah where no one is watching. Hold your tongue, as Anas held his, when striking back would only feed your ego. And cling, as he clung, to the love of the

Messenger ﷺ until it reshapes you from the inside. May Allah be pleased with Anas ibn Malik, gather us with the one he served at the fountain he was promised, and make us, in our small and ordinary lives, lovers who follow until following turns into love returned.

This chapter follows the account of Anas ibn Malik (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (3:31, 48:18). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Umm Sulaym bint Milhan

Her Dowry Was Islam

When a man came to her with gold and the offer of a comfortable life, the woman of Madinah looked past all of it and named a different price. She did not want his wealth or his property, though he owned more than any man in the city. There was only one gift she would accept, and it would cost him nothing and everything at once: that he believe in Allah and His Messenger. If he did that, she said, she would need no other dowry. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would later say that he knew of no woman whose dowry was nobler than hers. Her dowry was Islam.

Her name was Umm Sulaym bint Milhan (may Allah be pleased with her), and to understand the weight of that one decision, you have to know the woman who made it, and the life she had already lost before she made it.

The woman of Madinah

She was one of the most respected women of Yathrib, the city that would become Madinah. The histories remember her as exceedingly beautiful, but they dwell longer on something rarer: she was strong, assertive, independent of mind, one of the very few women of her city who could read and write in an age when literacy was uncommon among men and women alike. She knew poetry, and held a prized place in her society.

She is known to us by her kunya, Umm Sulaym, the mother of Sulaym. But Sulaym was not her son. He was her younger brother. She and her sister, Umm Haram, were each called by the names of their younger brothers, perhaps because they had been like mothers to those boys. Her own first name is reported in more than one form, and it may be that more than one is correct. What endures is the kunya, and the character behind it.

Imam al-Nawawi notes that she and her sister were considered maternal aunts of the Prophet ﷺ, whether through nursing or through lineage, for they were from Banu al-Najjar, the maternal relatives of Abdul Muttalib. This is why, when the Prophet ﷺ came to Yathrib, he came among people who were already, in this sense, his kin. It is the reason the closeness in her story will not feel strange: the Prophet ﷺ entering her home, resting there, speaking with her as family. The kinship was real enough to make her a mahram to him, and that detail quietly shapes everything that follows.

She was married to a man who matched her in standing, Malik ibn al-Nadr, counted among the richest men of Madinah, a merchant who had escaped the wars that thinned the men of his city only because he was away on a trade route when the killing happened. They had two sons. One was a young, beautiful boy named Anas, and through Anas a great river of this religion's knowledge would one day flow. He was named after his paternal uncle, Anas ibn al-Nadr, about whom Allah would later reveal a verse: having missed the battle of Badr, he vowed that if Allah gave him another chance the people would see what he would do, and he charged forward and was martyred urging others not to flee:

There are men among the believers who honoured their pledge to God: some of them have fulfilled it by death, and some are still waiting. They have not changed in the least.

QUR'AN 33:23

That was the family Umm Sulaym had married into: prominence, wealth, noble names. And then Islam came to Madinah, and she did not hesitate.

The first to believe in her city

Islam did not enter her household through her husband. Malik was away, as he so often was, on a trade route. It entered through her. She was present in the gathering of Mus'ab ibn Umayr, that small first circle of teaching in Madinah, and the moment she heard the call, faith landed in her heart and she embraced it. Some of the scholars say she was the very first woman in Yathrib to accept Islam. Think of the loneliness of that: to be the first, with her husband absent and her sons still children.

When Malik came home and found his wife praying to a God he did not know, he was furious. He used the mocking word the enemies of the faith reserved for converts, asking if she had turned away from the old ways. She corrected even his language. No, she said, but I believed; I became a Muslim, if that is what you are asking. He raged and threatened her and demanded she abandon this poison, reminding her of all the wealth he had given her, as if comfort in this world should have been enough to keep a heart from reaching for the next. She did not answer with anger. Instead she brought their little son Anas and began to teach him the words of faith, and her husband shouted at her not to corrupt his son the way she had corrupted herself.

It would have been easy to bend. At this early stage, before the rulings on marriage between believers and disbelievers had come, nothing required her to leave him; she simply would not give up what she had found. Malik did not take up arms against the faith; he was too busy with his money to take it seriously. Annoyed, he went off again to Syria on trade, and he never came back. On that journey he died, a disbeliever, and we do not know to this day where his grave lies. It is a quiet tragedy: all the good his son Anas would do, all the knowledge that would pour out for centuries, some weight of that might have settled in his scale had he only paused to consider what his wife had found. Instead he persisted, and the time ran out before he was ready. It is a lesson about the narrow window a person has when Allah shows him guidance, and how many drag their feet until it is gone.

And Umm Sulaym? Her last memory of her husband was estrangement, and now she was a widow, gone from the wife of a noble man to a woman alone. She had every reason to be shaken. Instead the histories find her patient, steady on her faith, drawing nearer to Allah in the very season that might have pulled another person away.

A dowry no one had ever asked for

She was still a woman others wished to marry. A man named Abu Talha, from her own clan of Banu al-Najjar, came to propose. He was, in worldly terms, another Malik: immensely wealthy, owning more property than anyone in Madinah, noble, and distinguished above all by his manners and his kindness to the poor. There was nothing wanting in him except the one thing she would not live without. He was not yet a believer.

So she told him plainly. A man like you, she said, is not the sort who is turned away. But you are a disbeliever, and I am a Muslim

woman, and you are not permitted for me. Abu Talha, taking it as negotiation, assumed she wanted a richer offer. She told him no. What she said next is one of the most extraordinary proposals of marriage in our history: she wanted no gold and no silver from him at all. If he would accept Islam, that would be her dowry, and she would be pleased with him as a husband, and ask for nothing else.

Abu Talha was taken aback, but he recognised sincere conviction, not a bargaining tactic. He said he would think about it, and came back days later asking if she had changed her mind. She had not. Neither had he, not yet. So she began, gently, to work on him. She saw him at his idols one day and asked what would happen to one of them thrown into a fire. It would burn, he admitted. So this, she said, is the kind of god you worship: the same wood a person burns to keep warm. He took the hint. And after some time he came back and said the words that changed his life: I believe in what you believe.

Her son Anas, then about ten years old, performed the marriage contract. And the Prophet ﷺ would later say the words that crowned it: we do not know of any woman whose dowry was nobler than that of Umm Sulaym, for her dowry was Islam. She had taken the wealth of the world, weighed it against one man's faith, and found the faith heavier.

Her son for the service of the Prophet ﷺ

When a group of the people of Madinah set out to give their pledge to the Prophet ﷺ, Umm Sulaym was among them, for she asserted herself in the way of good and would not be left behind. She went with a band of more than seventy men, her husband Abu Talha among them, carrying her little boy Anas.

There, watching others dedicate themselves to the Messenger ﷺ, she longed to give something of her own, more than a gift one could hold in the hand. So she presented her son: O Messenger of Allah, this is my son, here to serve you. Not a necklace, not a treasure. Her child. Make du'a for him.

It was the greatest favour she ever did for Anas, and he knew it; he would weep when he told this story as an old man. The Prophet ﷺ made three du'as over the boy: that Allah bless him in his wealth, in his children, and in all He would give him. Anas lived to see every word answered, and always traced the abundance of his life back to that one moment.

The house the Prophet ﷺ loved to enter

When the Prophet ﷺ settled in Madinah, he found that Umm Sulaym had set aside a part of her home as a place of prayer. She asked him to pray two units in it, and he honoured her, and it gave her great joy. Anas reports that there was no house in all of Madinah the Prophet ﷺ would enter the way he entered the house of Umm Sulaym. When someone gently observed how often he visited that family, he said something tender: this was mercy, for her brother had been martyred alongside him. The brothers of Umm Sulaym and Umm Haram had been killed in battle, and his closeness to this household was, in part, a kindness owed to that sacrifice.

The narrations of his visits are a window into his own character. Once he came and sat, and she brought out dates and butter to feed him. He told her to put them away; he was fasting. Then he went to the prayer place in her home and prayed there, and aloud he made du'a for her and her household, a separate, voluntary prayer, just for her. Nothing on this earth pleased her heart more.

She kept orphans in her care. Anas remembers standing behind the Prophet ﷺ with an orphan boy while his mother stood behind them, and the Prophet ﷺ led the three of them in prayer on a single mat. That one mat was everything in that home: their mattress at night, their carpet by day, their cloth spread out at mealtime. The woman who had been married to the richest man of Madinah in the days of ignorance, and then to the richest man of Madinah in Islam, prayed behind the Messenger ﷺ on one worn mat she rinsed with water and used for everything. It was simplicity chosen, not poverty suffered.

Bread that fed eighty men

One day Abu Talha came home troubled. He had heard hunger and fatigue in the voice of the Prophet ﷺ; look at how closely these people attended to their Messenger. Umm Sulaym did not hesitate. She gathered all the loaves she had, wrapped them in part of her headcloth, tucked the bundle under young Anas's arm, and sent him.

Anas carried the bread to the mosque, meaning to hand it over quietly, for there were many hungry men there. But the Prophet ﷺ stood and told everyone with him to come and eat, and set off toward the house. Anas ran ahead, alarmed, to warn his parents that the Messenger ﷺ was coming with a crowd and only a little bread waited. Umm Sulaym's answer was pure trust: Allah and His Messenger know best.

The Prophet ﷺ took the bread, broke it into pieces, asked for what little butter there was, and made du'a over it. Then he had ten men brought in and fed all ten from his own hands. Then ten more. Then ten more. Anas watched the Messenger ﷺ serve that bread, batch after batch, until eighty men had eaten their fill from a bundle a boy had carried under one arm, and from the bowl

that was left the family ate for two whole months. It was among the signs of his prophethood, witnessed by many.

Her household lived this way, woven through with blessing. Abu Talha's most beloved property was a garden called Beeruha, facing the mosque, where the Prophet ﷺ liked to sit in the shade and drink its sweet water. When the verse came down that no one attains true piety until he gives from what he loves, Abu Talha came at once and offered the whole garden, his most cherished possession, for the sake of Allah, and the Prophet ﷺ told him to keep some of it for his family. Listen to the verse that moved a wealthy man to give away the thing he loved most, the moment he heard it:

None of you [believers] will attain true piety unless you give out of what you cherish: whatever you give, God knows about it very well.

QUR'AN 3:92

And her devotion was not confined to the home. Abu Talha once told the Prophet ﷺ, half laughing, that during the battle of the Trench he had found her hiding a dagger, and when he asked what it was for she said she would stab any disbeliever who came near. You take care of the enemies in front, she told the Messenger ﷺ, and I will take care of any from behind.

The trust returned

Umm Sulaym and Abu Talha had a son together in Islam, a boy named Abu Umayr, remembered for a small pet bird he loved to play with. The Prophet ﷺ would come in and ask the little boy about his bird, and he even came to console the child when the

bird died, a glimpse of a Messenger who had time for the grief of a small boy over a small loss.

But a far greater grief came. Abu Umayr fell ill with a sudden fever and died quickly. And here Umm Sulaym did something the scholars are careful to call extraordinary, not a model to be copied but a window into the spirit of the Ansar, that selflessness Allah praises in the Qur'an. Grieving her own child, her mind went first to how the news would crush her husband, who was away. She told Anas not to tell him until she had, then washed and laid out her son, bathed, dressed, and prepared food. When Abu Talha came home he ate, and the night passed between them as husband and wife, and still she had not found the words. Only in the morning did she ask him: if someone lends you a trust for a time and then asks for it back, should you return it with resentment? No, he said; you return it with gratitude for the time you were allowed to keep it. Then, in a trembling voice, she told him that Allah had taken back the trust of his son.

He was hurt, angry that she had not told him sooner, and broken by the loss of his only child by her. He took his confusion to the Prophet ﷺ, who, as if he already knew something, smiled and said: may Allah bless the night you spent together. On that very night Umm Sulaym had conceived. From the grief over the child they buried, Allah was already bringing a child to be born. When the boy came they gave him the best of names, Abdullah, and the Prophet ﷺ came full of joy, picked him up, and rubbed a softened date on the roof of his mouth, laughing as the baby reached for more, saying that the Ansar love their dates. And from that one son, Anas swore, came seven sons, every one a memoriser of the entire Qur'an, in an age when that was rare. Umm Sulaym had refused to let grief turn her from her Lord, and

her Lord knew the pain of the believers and rewarded the patience that bore it.

The descendants of that family are now too many to trace, scholars and heroes of this religion among them, all running back through Anas, and through Umm Sulaym. And the Prophet ﷺ told of something that places the seal on her whole life. In an authentic narration he said he entered Paradise, and there, ahead of him, was a woman whose footsteps he had heard before him in the Garden. It was Umm Sulaym. And the visions of the prophets are truth.

What Umm Sulaym's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like hers and feel a clean, distant admiration, to file her under the company of the great and move on. That would be a loss, because her life is not a monument set out of reach. It is a question pressed against our own iman.

She set the right price on faith. When the world offered her gold, she answered that she would trade it all for one man's belief in Allah. That is the question her dowry puts to us: what is Islam actually worth to you, measured against the things you chase? She knew exactly what comfort feels like, and still judged a heart turned toward Allah to be the heavier treasure. We say faith is priceless and then live as though a little more income, a little more standing, a little more ease, would be worth bending it. Her dowry asks us to mean it.

She would not be moved off her faith, not by a furious husband, not by widowhood, not by guilt, not by loss. When her marriage broke over Islam and her husband died estranged from her, she did not let the wreckage make her doubt; she drew nearer to Allah in the very season that would have pulled most people

away. That is patience and contentment with the decree of Allah, sabr that does not curdle into bitterness. When hardship comes to you, and it will, her life asks whether your trust in Allah can survive the loss of the things you thought you could not live without. She lost a husband, a child, and a station in the world, and held to her Lord through every one.

And she did her good quietly, for Allah. The prayer corner in her home, the orphans she raised, the bread she sent without knowing it would feed eighty, the son she gave to the service of the Messenger ﷺ, none of it was done for an audience. That is ikhlas, the rarest currency there is: to act for Allah alone and be content that He has seen it. Ask how much of your own good is arranged for the eyes of people, and how much you could do the way she did, in the quiet of your home, for your Lord.

So take one thing from her into an ordinary day. Decide, today, that there is a price you will not pay, that your faith is not for sale at any worldly rate. Do one good deed that no one will ever know about, and leave it between you and Allah. When something is taken from you, return the trust with gratitude rather than complaint, as she taught her husband, because all of it was only ever a loan. This is how a woman of Madinah lived, sincere, steadfast, and certain that what she gave to Allah was never lost. May Allah be pleased with Umm Sulaym, and with her husband and her children, and raise us upon a measure of her faith, and gather us among those who walk ahead into the Garden.

This chapter follows the account of Umm Sulaym (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (33:23, 3:92). Where

the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Sa'd ibn Ubadah

The Generous Chief

There was a man in Madinah, before the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ ever set foot in the city, who climbed onto the roof of his own house every single day and called out across the rooftops to anyone within earshot. He was not calling them to a cause, or a tribe, or a war. He was calling them to dinner. Whoever was hungry, whoever was traveling, whoever had nothing, was invited to come and eat the best food in the house, not the leftover barley and dates that passed for charity, but meat and fat and the good portions a host keeps for honored guests. He did this when no one was watching for the sake of any reward, because there was no reward yet to hope for. He simply could not bear to eat well while someone nearby went without.

His name was Sa'd ibn Ubadah (may Allah be pleased with him), and to understand why his story matters, you have to understand that the future of an entire city once rested on two men, and he was one of them.

The two Sa'ds and a city on the edge

Madinah in those years was not a city at peace. It was two great tribes, the Aws and the Khazraj, who had spent generations bleeding one another in feuds that no one could fully remember the beginning of. Within those tribes were subtribes, and within the Khazraj was the clan of Banu Sa'idah. If you have walked

through Madinah, you may have passed the beautiful garden that belonged to them, the place that still carries their name. Sa'd's father, Ubadah, had been the chief of that clan. When he died, Sa'd took his place, and as the years passed he rose to become something larger: a unifying figure, one of the most respected men among the Khazraj, and eventually among the Aws as well.

People used to say there was a simple way to read which way the wind was blowing in Madinah. There was the Sa'd of the Aws, Sa'd ibn Mu'adh, and there was the Sa'd of the Khazraj, Sa'd ibn Ubadah. If those two men became Muslim, everyone understood that Islam was coming to Madinah, and nothing would stop it. The whole matter seemed to be balanced on the shoulders of these two chiefs.

There was another man in Madinah with very different ambitions. Abdullah ibn Ubayy had spent his years campaigning quietly to be made king of the city, the first man ever to unite it under a single crown. The crown, the narrations say, was already being made. His robes were being tailored for the coronation. He had won over the pagan tribes, the Jewish tribes, every faction that mattered, by getting along with everyone and offending no one. And then the Prophet ﷺ arrived, and Islam unmade all of it. For that, Abdullah ibn Ubayy would carry a bitterness he never put down, and he would oppose the Prophet ﷺ for the rest of his life.

A trait passed down like an inheritance

One of Sa'd's nicknames was al-Kamil, the complete, the perfect one, and it told you something about him before you ever met him. He was strikingly handsome. He could read and write in an age when few could, which itself set him apart. He wrote poetry, threw the spear, drew the bow, swam, and worked beautiful

calligraphy. People said there was no skill their society prized that he had not mastered, and mastered better than the rest.

But the quality that truly defined him was not any of these. It was generosity. And it was not his alone. His father had been famous for it before him, and his son would be famous for it after him, three generations of a single family who made open-handed giving the core of who they were. The scholars notice something quiet and important in this: generosity tends to travel down through families. Ask a generous person where it came from, and they will usually point to a parent. A family can take generosity as its identity and pass it on like an heirloom, and this is exactly what happened in the house of Sa'd.

Their reputation was such that poets wrote verses about it. When drought struck, Sa'd's father had fed the whole city. He kept a guest house for travelers. In times of disaster he protected the community and forgave the debts even of distant relatives he was barely related to. They were known across Madinah and far beyond it as the hosts of the city, the family any stranger could turn to. The Prophet ﷺ once said that people are like buried treasure, like precious metal, and that the best of them in the age before Islam are the best of them in Islam, if they understand the faith. Sa'd was the proof of it. He brought a noble trait with him into Islam, and Islam polished it until it shone.

The man who almost saved a city, and was tortured for it
When Mus'ab ibn Umayr brought Islam quietly to Madinah, and the news began to spread from house to house, the gathering reached Sa'd's clan. As'ad ibn Zurarah came first, then others, and finally Sa'd himself heard the commotion, came to see what was happening, and was told to sit and listen to what this man had to say. He listened, and within that single day he accepted

Islam. With him, the last of a small circle of leaders embraced the faith together, and that circle would carry Islam into the whole of Madinah.

When the rumor of what had happened reached Makkah, a poet climbed a great mountain on the edge of the sacred precinct and shouted out for the city to hear: if the two Sa'ds had become Muslim, then Muhammad ﷺ no longer needed to fear any of Quraysh. Abu Sufyan went to him and asked who these two Sa'ds were. The answer was plain. If those two have accepted him, you have lost. He has found a new home.

Sa'd traveled to the second pledge at Aqaba with seventy others from Madinah, gave his hand to the Prophet ﷺ, and was appointed one of the twelve chiefs, the leaders responsible for their people. But of all of them, he alone paid a price that the others did not. The whole pledge had been made in secret, in the days of Hajj, before Quraysh fully understood what was unfolding. When they finally caught the scent of it, they went hunting for the men of Madinah, and Sa'd was the only one they managed to seize.

What they did to him, he later described himself. He was brought out in chains, having gone days without food or water, starved and dehydrated. Through the crowd a strikingly handsome man came forward, and Sa'd looked at that face and thought to himself that if there was any good left in these people, it would be in this one. Surely this man had come to help. The man drew close, and then raised his hand and struck him as hard as anyone had. There was no good in them after all. They beat him and dragged him, and he simply endured it. Then someone leaned in and asked, with a kind of mockery, whether he had no trade partner in Makkah, no one who owed him anything, no one he

could call on to get himself out of this. And Sa'd remembered. When certain powerful men of Makkah came to Madinah, he was their host. He gave their names. His captors went and asked those men whether it was true, and they answered that yes, this was the man who received them, a generous and noble man who opened his home to them and smoothed their trade routes. And so they let him go. His generosity, given freely years earlier with no thought of return, was the very thing that saved his life.

He made it back to Madinah after the rest, scarred by an ordeal that the other Ansar had been spared. He was, in a real sense, the one companion from Madinah who tasted something of the torture the early Muslims of Makkah had borne.

A kitchen that never closed

When the Prophet ﷺ made the migration to Madinah and paired each emigrant with a host from among the Ansar, Sa'd took two men into his home, including a beloved and noble companion, and housed them for three full years until they could stand on their own. This was simply how he lived. His house became, in effect, the soup kitchen of Madinah, open every single night.

There were people in those days who slept in the mosque itself, not the poor among the local Muslims, but newcomers, men arriving from Yemen and beyond as Madinah grew into a city that drew people from across the world. They were temporarily without a home, and the mosque sheltered them until they found their feet. Every evening, the people of Madinah would come and take a guest or two home to feed. One man might take one. A more generous man might take a small group. Sa'd took eighty. Every night, eighty people ate dinner at his table, very nearly whoever was left after everyone else had chosen.

When the Prophet ﷺ stayed in the house of his host in Madinah, every single night someone would knock on the door carrying trays of food, and it was from Sa'd. Even after the Prophet ﷺ had his own homes, Sa'd's meals followed him there. The Prophet ﷺ would give much of it away, but Sa'd would not stop sending it. Feeding people was not something he did. It was who he was.

Once he gathered the choicest cuts of forty different animals and set the feast before the Prophet ﷺ, who ate very little. The Prophet ﷺ asked what this was, and Sa'd explained: I took the best of all forty so that you could have the best, and whatever you do not want, I will give to the people of Madinah. Take your share first. Long after, the mother of the caliph Harun al-Rashid, a woman of immense wealth and nobility, heard the story of those forty animals and was so moved that she ordered her servants to find the descendants of Sa'd, gave them a great share of her own wealth, and declared that none of them would ever go hungry in her lifetime, out of love for what this man had done for the Prophet ﷺ. Generations later, his generosity was still earning him kindness from strangers.

When the Prophet ﷺ finished eating Sa'd's food one day, he made a supplication for him that Muslims still say over their hosts to this day: that those who fast may break their fast with you, that the righteous may eat your food, and that the angels may send their peace upon you. Sa'd taught us that prayer simply by being the kind of man people prayed for.

The shape of his soul

The Prophet ﷺ never tried to break the strong personalities around him or reshape them into copies of one another. He did not try to soften the warrior or dull the chief. He grew people in

their own genius, and Sa'd was a vivid, complicated, unforgettable man whom the Prophet ﷺ loved exactly as he was.

He had a fierce sense of honor and protectiveness, what the Arabs called ghayrah, the noble jealousy a man feels over his family and his people. When the Prophet ﷺ was teaching that justice cannot be taken into one's own hands, Sa'd spoke up with such intensity about defending his household that the companions were startled. The Prophet ﷺ was not angry. He said: are you amazed at the ghayrah of Sa'd? Then he added that he himself had more ghayrah than Sa'd, and Allah has more than all of us, and it was out of that protective jealousy that Allah forbade what is shameful. The point was not recklessness. It was that a protective, honorable heart is a noble thing, and Sa'd had one.

That same intensity could be tender. When the Prophet's grandchild lay dying and the Prophet ﷺ held the child and wept, Sa'd, unused to such open emotion, asked what this was. And it was Sa'd who carried to us the answer: that this weeping is a mercy Allah places in the hearts of His servants, and Allah shows mercy to those who are merciful. He was a man strong enough to be gentle and to learn, in front of everyone, what gentleness was.

He loved the Prophet ﷺ with a quiet hunger that shows in the smallest stories. Once the Prophet ﷺ came to give the greeting of peace at Sa'd's door, and Sa'd answered in a low voice. The Prophet ﷺ repeated the greeting, and again Sa'd answered softly, and a third time, until the Prophet ﷺ began to walk away. Then Sa'd's son rushed out and caught him, and Sa'd explained that he had heard every greeting and had answered low on purpose, so that the Prophet ﷺ would keep saying it, and he could drink in the blessing of that peace again and again. On

another day the Prophet ﷺ stood outside Sa'd's home, raised his hands, and supplicated for Sa'd and his family by name, sending prayers upon a man while he still walked the earth.

The chief among chiefs, and the night the Prophet wept

After Sa'd ibn Mu'adh passed away, Sa'd ibn Ubadah was looked upon as the leader of the Ansar as a whole. In the battles of the Prophet ﷺ, the emigrants marched behind one banner and the Ansar behind another, and the banner of the Ansar was carried by Sa'd. He was there for the great events, the trials and the triumphs alike. During the digging of the trench around Madinah, when the army was besieged and starving, it was Sa'd's stored reserve of dates and food that fed the Muslims for weeks, until even that ran out. He spent on the people when there was almost nothing left to spend.

He was not flawless, and the histories do not hide it. In the painful episode of the slander against the Prophet's wife, he stood up and offered to deal with whoever had spread it, whether the man came from his own tribe or the other, but his words landed in a charged moment, a retort from the rival side answered him, and old tribal lines nearly tore the Muslims apart from the inside in a moment when their enemies could not. On the day Makkah was conquered, marching with the banner, he called out that this was a day of vengeance. Abu Sufyan complained to the Prophet ﷺ, and the Prophet ﷺ did not humiliate Sa'd. He simply said that Sa'd had erred, took the banner from him, and handed it to Sa'd's own son. The correction was firm and the dignity was preserved.

Near the very end, something happened that reveals how deeply the Prophet ﷺ loved this man. Before the Prophet's final illness, Sa'd himself fell gravely ill, and the Prophet ﷺ went with some of

his companions to visit him in the quarter of Banu Sa'idah. He found Sa'd slipping in and out of consciousness, and he asked, has he died? Has he died? When he was told Sa'd was still clinging on, the Prophet ﷺ burst into tears. The companions, seeing their Messenger weep so freely, wept with him, and they understood in that moment exactly how much Sa'd meant to him. Then the Prophet ﷺ taught them what he had taught Sa'd before: that Allah does not punish for the tears of the eye nor the grief of the heart, but for what the tongue says, and he told them to weep as much as they wished, for this is the mercy Allah places in us.

Sa'd recovered. The Prophet ﷺ did not. By the decree of Allah, the chief lived and the Messenger ﷺ was taken, and the city was caught between two sickbeds, grieving the loss it could not yet imagine.

What Sa'd's life asks of our faith

When the Prophet ﷺ passed away, the Ansar gathered in the hall of Banu Sa'idah and were on the verge of pledging the leadership of all the Muslims to Sa'd ibn Ubadah. That is how great this man was in the eyes of his people. It was Abu Bakr, with Umar and Abu Ubaydah beside him, who came and gently turned the moment, and Sa'd, even where there was discomfort, never raised a rebellion. He held Madinah steady through the most paralyzing loss the believers had ever known. He later lived a quiet life and died in Sham, and his son went on to become a famous general of Islam.

But sit with the thing the Prophet ﷺ chose to highlight at the end of Sa'd's story, because it is the most beautiful part. Almost every narration that survives from Sa'd in his later years is about his mother. He loved her deeply. While he was away on an

expedition, she died in Madinah, and his first thought was that the Prophet ﷺ pray over her. When he learned her last words had been an instruction to give her wealth in charity through him, because she knew he would spend it well for Allah, Sa'd went to the Prophet ﷺ and asked whether charity given on her behalf would reach her now that she was gone. He was told that it would. And so he began. He gave the best of their gardens for her. He fulfilled the oaths she had left unfinished. And when he asked what charity would benefit her most, what gift could keep on giving after she was buried, the Prophet ﷺ answered: water. So Sa'd dug wells, and from this one grieving son comes the practice that Muslims still follow, of building a well so that a parent keeps earning reward long after death.

Here is what his life asks of you, and it is not merely that you become a generous person, though you should. It is something deeper about trust and sincerity. Sa'd gave for years before there was any reward to hope for, calling strangers to his table from a rooftop, expecting nothing back, and Allah quietly recorded all of it. The hospitality he offered with no agenda became the rope that pulled him out of chains. The food he sent night after night became a supplication on the lips of believers fourteen centuries later. The charity he poured out for his mother became flowing wells whose reward never stopped. He could not have engineered any of this. He simply gave for the sake of Allah and left the outcome to Allah, and not one atom of it was lost.

That is the lesson for an ordinary life now. You will rarely see the return on the good you do, and you must learn to give anyway, the way Sa'd did, trusting that Allah sees what people miss and keeps what the world forgets. So do something today that no one will applaud. Feed someone. Quietly settle a debt that is not yours to carry. Give in a parent's name, living or dead, and ask

Allah to let the reward reach them. Do it not to be known as generous, but because Allah is generous and loves those who imitate that quality for His sake alone. The world counted Sa'd as a chief and a host. Allah counted every meal. May Allah be pleased with Sa'd ibn Ubadah, make our hands open as his were, and let whatever good we send ahead reach us on the day we have nothing else.

This chapter follows the account of Sa'd ibn Ubadah (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). It quotes no Qur'an directly, as the lecture cited none by chapter and verse; the sayings of the Prophet ﷺ are paraphrased as they appear in the lecture. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Sa'd ibn Mu'adh

The Man for Whom the Throne Shook

There is a kind of man who walks into a room and the room rearranges itself around him. People stop talking. They turn. They wait to hear what he will say. Sa'd ibn Mu'adh (may Allah be pleased with him) was that kind of man in the city of Yathrib, and when he finally bowed his head to Allah, an entire tribe bowed with him in a single afternoon. He was a Muslim for only about six years, and in those six years he did so little that the world would call remarkable, and so much that the heavens could not contain their joy, that when he died the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ told his companions a thing he never said about anyone else: that the Throne of the Most Merciful shook at the return of this man's soul.

To understand how a chief of a feuding desert clan became that man, you have to begin in a garden in Yathrib, on the day a stranger arrived to teach a new faith.

A leader before he was a believer

Sa'd was from the tribe of Aws, one of the two great Arab tribes of Yathrib, the city that would become Madinah. The other was Khazraj, the larger of the two. For generations these two tribes had bled each other in wars no one could remember how to stop, wars that buried fathers and left their sons hungry for an end to it all. Sa'd was the son of Mu'adh, a leader of his people, and

through his mother he was tied to Khazraj as well, so that the very feud running through his city ran through his own blood.

He was about thirty-one years old, and already his people looked to him the way you look to someone older and steadier than yourself. He was a sayyid, a chief, the sort of presence that commanded respect without raising his voice. When Sa'd entered a gathering, everyone knew a leader had walked in, and the young men of Yathrib who were tired of the killing looked to him to bring their city peace.

Into this fragile city had come a quiet man named Mus'ab ibn Umayr, sent by the Prophet ﷺ to teach Islam, hosted in the garden of As'ad ibn Zurarah. People were gathering to listen, and the faith was beginning to spread, and this alarmed the leaders. Sa'd was sitting with his cousin Usayd ibn Hudayr, and because a public confrontation between cousins would have caused a scene, Sa'd sent Usayd in his place. Go, he said, and put an end to this nonsense. See what these two are doing in our gardens and stop it.

Usayd went with his spear, angry. He came back transformed. Sa'd looked at his cousin's face and knew at once: this was not the face that had left him. Something had happened to him. Usayd had sat down to listen, and Islam had taken hold of his heart.

The afternoon a tribe believed

So Sa'd rose himself, and this time no one could send him. He went toward the garden burning with anger, certain that Mus'ab was part of a plot against his family. Mus'ab and As'ad were still there, still teaching, when this man of obvious authority strode in. As'ad warned Mus'ab quietly: this is the chief of his people. If he

accepts, his whole tribe will follow. Be patient with him. Be careful how you speak to him.

Sa'd arrived with hard words. Mus'ab answered him softly. Why not sit, he said, and listen? If you like what I say, accept it. If you do not, I will leave you in peace. It was a fair offer, and Sa'd was a fair man. He set down his weapons and he sat. He listened. And the same thing that had reached his cousin reached him. When Mus'ab finished, the chief of Aws asked, with the wonder of a man who has seen something he cannot un-see, how do I enter this religion? He washed, said the testimony of faith, prayed two units of prayer, and then walked back to his people a different man.

What he did next reveals the leader in him. He stood before his tribe, who gathered around him because that was what they did when he stood, and he asked them a question that chiefs of that age liked to ask just to hear their own praise. How do you regard me among you? They answered as he expected. You are the best of us. Our chief. The most trustworthy. The one we turn to in all our affairs. He had set the trap with his own reputation, and now he sprang it. Then I swear, he said, that I will not speak a word to a single one of you, not your men and not your women, until you believe in Allah and His Messenger.

It was meant to shake them, and it did. What does that mean, they asked, to believe in Allah and His Messenger? So he told them everything he had learned in those few short moments in the garden. And there was something in that place that Allah had blessed, something that moved hearts faster than argument, because by the end of that one conversation, on that same day, every man and woman of his tribe had entered Islam. It had begun that morning with Mus'ab and a handful of listeners. By

evening, the whole of Aws were Muslim, and the city that would shelter the Prophet ﷺ was opening to the faith in waves.

The friend who would not be warned

Before the migration, Sa'd had a friendship that tells you a great deal about the world he lived in. Like many leaders of Yathrib, he had a trade partner in Makkah, and his happened to be Umayyah ibn Khalaf, the same Umayyah who tortured Bilal in the sand, a man whose name the Muslims spoke the way you speak of cruelty itself. When Umayyah came to Yathrib, Sa'd hosted him. When Sa'd came to Makkah, Umayyah hosted him. That was the arrangement, and it had held for years.

On one such visit Sa'd wanted to make tawaf around the Ka'bah, and Umayyah, to keep his guest safe in a hostile city, walked out with him in the hot middle of the day when the sanctuary would be empty. Abu Jahl came upon them and turned on Sa'd: you walk in safety around our Ka'bah, after you shelter our fugitives, these people who abandoned our religion? Sa'd did not shrink. If you try to stop me, he answered, I will cut off your caravans on the road past Yathrib, and your trade will go nowhere. They were nearly at each other's throats. Umayyah, forced to choose, sided with his own people, and Sa'd turned on his friend with a warning that should have saved his life. You are a fool to cling to this, he said. I heard Muhammad ﷺ say that they are going to kill you.

Umayyah froze, because he knew, as all of them secretly knew, that this man Muhammad ﷺ did not lie. He went home shaken, and when the day of Badr came he did not want to march. He believed the warning even as he refused to heed the warner, and it was Abu Jahl who shamed him into going, taunting him until he rode out to the death the Prophet ﷺ had foretold. Sa'd had handed him the truth, and he had taken it home and locked it in a

drawer. That is the tragedy of arrogance: it can know a thing is true and still refuse to be moved by it.

The truthful one of the Ansar

When the Prophet ﷺ migrated to Madinah and the Muslims faced the Quraysh at Badr, the battle was nothing the believers had prepared for. They had set out to intercept a caravan, and instead Abu Sufyan had drawn them into the path of a great army marching from Makkah to destroy them. The Muslims had few horses, few weapons, no readiness for open war. The enemy had everything. And the Prophet ﷺ, before committing his companions to it, sat among them and asked their counsel.

This was the first real test of the Emigrants and the Helpers together. The men of Makkah spoke first. But the Prophet ﷺ kept asking what the people thought, and Sa'd understood why. The Helpers of Madinah had pledged to defend the Prophet ﷺ within their city against any enemy that came to them. Badr was not in Madinah. By the letter of their oath, the Ansar could have turned back and gone home with no blame, though they made up more than two-thirds of that small army. The Prophet ﷺ would not force them; he honored the pledge they had given. And so he kept asking, until Sa'd realized the question was meant for the Ansar.

By now As'ad ibn Zurarah, who had led the Helpers in the early days, had died, the first funeral prayer in Islam. It fell to Sa'd to answer for them all. Perhaps you mean us, Messenger of Allah, he said, and then he gave words that became part of who the Ansar were. We have believed you. We have borne witness that what you brought is the truth, and we have given you our oaths to hear and obey. Go forward to whatever you intend, and we are with you. By the One who sent you with the truth, if you led us

into the sea, we would plunge in with you, and not one of us would hold back. We do not hate to meet our enemy tomorrow. We are patient in war and fierce in battle, and perhaps Allah will show you something from us that will be the coolness of your eyes. So march on, with the blessing of Allah.

The face of the Prophet ﷺ lit up with joy. These were his people, the Emigrants and the Helpers both, and the man who had bound the Ansar to him in that hour earned a name from that day: Sidiq al-Ansar, the truthful one of the Helpers, just as Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) was the truthful one of the whole community. Sa'd's voice carried the Helpers into Badr unwavering, and after Badr no Muslim ever forgot the men who fought there. The best among them, the Prophet ﷺ said, were the veterans of Badr. Sa'd had bought his people a share in that.

The man who chose his Lord over a crown

Of all that Sa'd did, his greatest hour came at the Battle of the Trench. The tribes of Arabia had massed to wipe out the Muslims once and for all, and the believers had dug a trench around Madinah to hold them off. Then came the news that turned the siege into a nightmare: Banu Qurayzah inside the city, bound by treaty to the Muslims, was conspiring with the enemy to attack from within while the armies pressed from without. The Muslims could not spare a single gap in the trench. If the enemy broke through, everyone would die. This is the terror Allah described:

They massed against you from above and below; your eyes rolled [with fear], your hearts rose into your throats, and you thought [ill] thoughts of God.

QUR'AN 33:10

This betrayal struck close to Sa'd, because Aws had long been allies of Banu Qurayzah, and they trusted him. So the Prophet ﷺ sent him to learn the truth, and the tribe let him in and spoke freely before him, all but confirming their treachery, certain that their old friend would shield them when the reckoning came. Sa'd revealed nothing. He returned and reported what he had heard.

It was during this siege that Sa'd was struck. An arrow pierced his arm at the very place his armor did not cover, the sleeveless shoulder that Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), sheltering with his mother, had wished aloud were better protected. The wound opened an artery, and the blood would not stop. Believing he might die, Sa'd made a supplication that shows you the whole shape of his heart. O Allah, he prayed, if there is any war left with Quraysh, let me live to see it, for there are no people I would rather fight than those who hurt Your Prophet and drove him from his home and called him a liar. But if You have decreed that the war with Quraysh is over, then let this wound be my martyrdom. And do not let me die until You cool my eyes with the judgment of Banu Qurayzah.

Most of us, struck down, would ask only for Paradise. Sa'd asked first to keep fighting for the Prophet ﷺ, and only failing that, for the honor of dying for him, and even then to live just long enough to see justice done to the tribe that had betrayed his Messenger. Allah answered every part of it. There would be no more battles with Quraysh after the Trench. And Banu Qurayzah, when the siege broke and they surrendered, asked to be judged not by the Prophet ﷺ but by their old ally, Sa'd ibn Mu'adh. The Prophet ﷺ granted it.

Sa'd had to be carried to them, so little life was left in him. On the way the hypocrites crowded his stretcher, pressing him to go

soft, to betray the Prophet ﷺ for the sake of his old friends. Sa'd answered that the time had come for him to fear no one's blame in the matter of Allah. He arrived, and the Prophet ﷺ told the people to stand for their chief. Too modest to look directly at the Prophet ﷺ, Sa'd asked the Muslims if they would accept his judgment, they said yes, and he pronounced it: he ruled by the law that Banu Qurayzah's own scripture demanded for high treason, that the fighting men be put to death. And the Prophet ﷺ said that Sa'd had judged with the judgment of Allah from above the seven heavens.

Here is the thing that makes Sa'd's life burn so bright. He had not been born into Islam with nothing to lose. He had been a chief, and when he brought the Prophet ﷺ into his city, he gave up his own claim to be king of it. Another man of Madinah, Abdullah ibn Ubayy, had a crown all but waiting for him, and he never forgave the Prophet ﷺ for taking it, poisoning himself with that resentment for the rest of his life. Sa'd had every worldly reason to do the same. Instead he laid the crown down and chose his Lord, and he never once looked back at it.

The throne shook for him

Sa'd was carried back to the tent that had been pitched for him in the mosque, where the Prophet ﷺ would hurry to visit him every single day, going to him first after his prayer. The wound never closed. Within days the blood began to flow again from beneath the tent, and they knew that Sa'd had gone. He had been a Muslim for about six years.

What happened then was unlike anything the companions had witnessed. The Prophet ﷺ told them that the Throne of the Most Merciful shook with joy at the death of Sa'd ibn Mu'adh, at the return of his soul. For the souls of the martyrs rest in lamps hung

from that Throne, and just as men had stood when their chief entered a gathering on earth, the martyrs of Paradise rose to receive him. When they carried his body to the grave, it was so light in their hands that they felt no weight in it, and the hypocrites, mocking to the end, said it was because he was a man of no account. The Prophet ﷺ told them the truth: his body was light because the angels themselves were competing to carry him.

There is one more image worth keeping. Long after, the Prophet ﷺ wore a fine garment that had come to him as a gift from a foreign land, the most beautiful cloth the companions had ever seen on him, and they reached out to touch it, marveling. The Prophet ﷺ asked them, do you find this garment so wonderful? By Allah, the handkerchief of Sa'd ibn Mu'adh in Paradise is finer than this. Do not be dazzled by the cloth. What Allah had given that man for laying down his crown was greater than anything this world could offer.

What Sa'd's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like Sa'd's and stand back in awe, to file him under heroes and feel that he has nothing to do with the small, undramatic shape of our own days. That would be a mistake. Sa'd was a Muslim for six years. Most of us have had longer than that already, and we have not yet emptied our hands of the things he gave up in an afternoon. His life is not a monument. It is a set of questions put to our iman, and they are sharper than they first appear.

The first question is about what we are clutching. Sa'd held a crown, and he let it fall for the sake of Allah without a backward glance, while another man held the same crown and let it rot his heart for life. Few of us will ever hold a literal throne, but every

one of us is holding something we are afraid Allah might ask us to put down: a grudge we will not release, a comfort we will not risk, a standing we will not let slip, a way of life we quietly know is not pleasing to Him. When the call of Allah and the thing in your hand pull in different directions, which one wins? Sa'd answered that once, completely, and it set him free. Most of us answer it a hundred times a day and keep choosing the crown.

The second question is about sincerity. Watch what Sa'd asked for when he thought he was dying. Not to be seen, not to be remembered. He asked to keep fighting for the Prophet ﷺ if there was fighting left, and if not, to die for him, and to live just long enough to see justice done for him. Every clause was for Allah and His Messenger, not one for himself. That is ikhlas, the rarest thing, doing the deed for Allah alone and being content that He has seen it. Ask yourself how much of what you do is bent toward the eyes of people, the approval, the quiet hope that someone will notice, and how much you could do the way Sa'd did, with your face turned from the crowd and toward your Lord.

The third question is about trust. When the arrow tore his arm open, Sa'd did not rage against the decree or ask why this was happening to him. He turned the moment into a supplication, placing his living and his dying in the hands of the One who had given him both. He had the same contentment with Allah on the stretcher that he had in the days of his power, because his peace was never in his circumstances. It was in his Lord. Hardship is coming for you, as it comes for everyone, and his life asks whether your trust in Allah is deep enough to hold when the things you lean on are taken away.

And here is the part meant to lift your heart. Nothing Sa'd gave to Allah was lost. He surrendered a kingdom and was given a place

where the martyrs rise to greet him and the very Throne trembles with joy at his arrival. He bled out in a tent, mocked by hypocrites who said his light body proved him worthless, while the angels fought for the honor of carrying him and his handkerchief in Paradise outshone the finest silk on earth. What looked, from the outside, like a chief who threw away his city on a doomed cause was in truth the most successful life a man could spend. That is the promise that should reshape how you live today. What you give to Allah, He keeps. What you suffer for Him, He sees. What the world calls foolish, He may be recording as the wisest thing you ever did.

So take one thing from Sa'd into your ordinary life. Find the one crown you are holding, the thing you will not let go for the sake of Allah, and loosen your grip on it a little, today, before you are forced to. Do one act purely for Him that no one will ever know about. Meet one piece of His decree without a word of complaint. That is how the man for whom the Throne shook lived, and it is a way still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Sa'd ibn Mu'adh, raise us upon a measure of his sincerity and his courage, and gather us among the souls that rest in lamps beneath His Throne.

This chapter follows the account of Sa'd ibn Mu'adh (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (33:10). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Usayd ibn Hudayr

Transformed by the Qur'an

There is a kind of man whose whole life seems built for one moment: the lineage, the intelligence, the voice, the standing, all gathered in him like a tool waiting for a hand. And then a stranger sits down in a garden, recites a few lines, and the man who walked over to silence him walks back changed beyond recognition. His own people see it in his face before he says a word. This is the story of Usayd ibn Hudayr (may Allah be pleased with him), and it begins not with him but with the wreckage of the city he was about to help rebuild.

A city exhausted by its own blood

To understand Usayd, you have to understand Yathrib, the city that would become Madinah, in the years before the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ arrived. It was a place that had nearly destroyed itself. Two great tribes, Aws and Khazraj, had fought a long and bitter war, and the worst of it was a battle the people remembered with trauma in their voices: the day of Bu'ath. When it was over the elders were mostly gone. The men left standing as leaders were young, in their twenties and thirties, while in Makkah the chiefs were men of seventy and eighty, surrounded by their sons and their sons' sons.

That difference matters more than it first appears. In Makkah, arrogance had decades to harden. In Yathrib, the young men who

now led the city were tired of the fighting, sick of the division, and quietly open to another way to live. Allah had used their own exhaustion to soften their hearts.

Usayd was one of these young men. His father, Hudayr, known as Abu Yahya, had been a chief of one of the two tribes that fought on the day of Bu'ath, and he was killed in that battle. So Usayd was the son of a slain chief, raised into leadership in a wounded city. He was, by every account, remarkable even before Islam: intelligent and literate at a time when reading and writing were rare even in Makkah, fluent in poetry, with a beautiful voice and speech that flowed so coherently that people loved to hear him talk. He had a large, warm personality, joked easily, and knew how to calm a hostile person and disarm a tense situation. He was handsome, and a sportsman, said to have the most accurate spear-throw of all Yathrib. He was the natural spokesman of his people.

When Islam came to his city, it came to a man with everything: voice, mind, courage, charm, and rank. The only question was what he would do with it.

The spear that was planted in the ground

The answer came in a garden, under a palm tree, on a single extraordinary day.

The Prophet ﷺ had sent ahead to Yathrib a young teacher named Mus'ab ibn Umayr, the first ambassador of Islam to the city. Mus'ab had been welcomed into the home of As'ad ibn Zurarah, and the two sat teaching a small group, the weak and the vulnerable, the ones Islam always seems to reach first. As'ad, it happened, was the maternal cousin of Sa'd ibn Mu'adh, one of the most respected leaders of the Aws. When Sa'd heard that his

cousin was gathering the youth and the downtrodden around this man from Makkah, he was alarmed.

But Sa'd did not go himself. If he confronted his own cousin, it would become a public fight between leaders, and Usayd had a gentler way with people. So Sa'd handed him the spear and told him to go and put a stop to it before it spread. And Usayd walked toward the garden.

Picture the scene from inside it. A group sits captivated by Mus'ab. As'ad sees his cousin's man approaching, angry and armed, and knows what it means. But Mus'ab does not flinch. As'ad leans in and tells him quietly: this man is a leader of his people; if he accepts Islam, a great many will accept it after him.

Usayd reached them with the spear in his hand. He was not cruel and not by nature aggressive; he was a man trying to clean up a situation. But he spoke firmly. He told Mus'ab that he was playing with the minds of poor, simple people who did not understand the poison he had carried from Makkah, and told him to get up and leave, or be made to leave the hard way.

And here Mus'ab did something that only a person completely sure of what he carried could do. He smiled, and said, roughly: O leader of your people, may I offer you something better? Sit down and listen. If you like it, accept it. And if you do not, then by God I will get up and go, and never speak to anyone in this city again.

It was a bold offer, and it revealed a man with total confidence in his message. Usayd respected that. He took his spear and planted it in the ground, and sat down, and said: that is fair. Go ahead. Tell me what you have.

Mus'ab did not argue. He simply began to recite the Qur'an.

What a few lines can do to a heart

This is the heart of the whole story, and it is worth slowing down for. Mus'ab did not recite a verse or two and stop. He sat there and recited, and recited, and recited, and Usayd listened with his full presence. And as he listened, this big, confident, eloquent leader began to be moved. As'ad knew what was happening; the new believers around them knew. Something was reaching into the man.

When Mus'ab finished, Usayd did not respond with another threat or a clever line. He said: what beautiful words these are, and how noble. Then, without a list of questions, he asked the only thing that mattered: how does a person enter this faith of yours?

Mus'ab told him: purify yourself, cleanse your garments, bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger, and pray two units of prayer. So Usayd rose, washed, purified his garments, and there in that garden bore witness and prayed two rak'ahs. The man who had walked over with a spear to break up a gathering had joined it.

Then he walked back to Sa'd, who had sent him. And what happened next is one of those quiet echoes in the seerah that, once you notice it, you never forget. Sa'd looked at him coming and said: by Allah, Usayd is coming back to you with a face different from the one I sent him with.

Compare that to a scene in Makkah. There, a noble man named Utbah had once gone to listen to the Prophet ﷺ recite, and was so moved that he put his hand over the Prophet's mouth, unable to bear it, because in his heart he knew it was divine. But when he returned to his people, they said almost the identical words: he has come back with a face different from the one he left with.

And Utbah, knowing what he knew, chose his disbelief anyway, and continued to oppose the Prophet ﷺ.

Two men. The same recognition on their faces. The same words from their friends. One arrogance, one openness. The scholars draw a striking lesson here. What had stopped the people of Makkah, who had known the Prophet ﷺ for over forty years and called him al-Amin, the trustworthy, from following him? Not lack of evidence. Arrogance. Their pride became a veil between them and the beauty right in front of them. The people of Yathrib had never even met him, yet they were ready, because their hearts were not blocked. Usayd's heart had no veil over it, and a few lines of the Qur'an reached straight in and transformed him.

From that day, Usayd ibn Hudayr was a man marked by his love of the Qur'an. He was the first of the three great men of his quarter to accept Islam, and that opened the door for the rest.

The man the angels came down to hear

Usayd took his place quickly among the foremost of the believers. He was among those who pledged themselves to the Prophet ﷺ at the second pledge at Aqabah, the gathering of seventy from Yathrib, where the Prophet ﷺ appointed him one of the twelve chiefs, the nuqaba, entrusted with their people.

The praise that gathered around him is rare. The Prophet ﷺ did not prefer anyone among the Ansar over Usayd and the two other leaders of his sub-tribe, saying of these three that none was better than them. Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) praised him; Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) loved him. But the quality that defined him was the one born in that garden: his love of the Qur'an, which had taken hold of his heart and his voice together.

When Usayd recited the Qur'an in his home, people would gather around the house to listen. When he walked into a gathering, they wanted him to lead the prayer, because his voice was beautiful and his recitation carried something more than beauty: the presence of a man whose heart was fully in it. When he once led his people while ill, the Prophet ﷺ instructed that they should pray sitting behind him as he sat.

But it was not only people who gathered to hear him. One night Usayd was reciting Surah al-Baqarah, and his horse, tethered nearby, began to startle, so much so that it nearly trampled his young son Yahya, asleep beside him. When he told the Prophet ﷺ what had happened, he learned that the angels had been descending to listen to his recitation. The point is plain. This was a worshipper. The Qur'an had soaked into him, and the unseen world responded to his voice.

Perhaps the most beautiful thing he ever said about himself reveals the inner life behind that voice. Usayd said there were three states in which, if death came to him, he would have no doubt that he was among the people of Paradise. The first: when he read the Qur'an or listened to it, his heart was so present and so overwhelmed that he knew, if he died then, he would be of the people of Jannah. The second: when he sat in the Friday gathering listening to the Prophet ﷺ from the pulpit. And the third, the one that lingers longest: at a funeral prayer, for he never attended a janazah without walking himself, in his heart, through everything about to happen to that body in the grave, as if he were the one being buried. The thread running through all three is presence. He was not a man going through motions. He was awake.

Tested at Uhud, and trusted by the Prophet ﷺ

Usayd was not among the Ansar who witnessed Badr, and it troubled him deeply. The expeditions before Badr had been small affairs to intercept the Makkan caravans, and Usayd had assumed this one was the same. When the Prophet ﷺ returned victorious, Usayd said, with complete honesty: by Allah, I did not think you were going out for a real battle. Had I known what it would be, I would never have missed it. And the Prophet ﷺ said: you have told the truth. He knew Usayd was sincere.

There is a verse Allah revealed about the believers who were truthful in the covenant they had made with Him:

There are men among the believers who honoured their pledge to God: some of them have fulfilled it by death, and some are still waiting. They have not changed in the least.

QUR'AN 33:23

Some proved their truthfulness immediately, and some had to wait, but none wavered when the test came. Usayd proved it at Uhud. When the day turned and most of the army scattered, a small group of companions stayed close to the Prophet ﷺ and absorbed the danger. Many were killed. Usayd did not flee. He took seven major wounds that day, wounds that remained visible on him until he died. The man who had grieved that he missed one battle made sure, with his own blood, that no one could doubt his word at the next.

A big personality, and a heart with no love of position

If the wounds show his courage, other moments show the warmth that made his people love him. Usayd laughed and joked easily, and sometimes at the wrong moment. Before one battle, with the army tense and men gripping their spears, Usayd was

making the companions laugh. The Prophet ﷺ, passing by, poked him gently in the side with a stick. Usayd, half in jest, said: O Messenger of Allah, you have hurt me, let me take my retaliation. The Prophet ﷺ did not brush him off. He said: you are right, take your retaliation. Usayd pointed out that the Prophet ﷺ had poked his bare side while himself being covered, so the Prophet ﷺ lifted his garment and bared his side for him. And Usayd, knowing now what he had wanted all along, leaned in and kissed the side of the Prophet ﷺ and embraced him, smiling, and said: this is all I wanted, O Messenger of Allah. From a man of his rank and dignity, the exchange tells you the tenderness of the bond between them.

That same loyalty showed in harder moments. When the chief hypocrite sneered that on returning to Madinah the honourable would drive out the disgraced, meaning that he himself would drive out the Prophet ﷺ, the Prophet ﷺ asked Usayd whether he had heard it. Usayd answered for the Ansar with total clarity: O Messenger of Allah, you are the honourable one and he is the disgraced; if you wish, you can drive him out. Then he counselled mercy, for the man was only bitter that he imagined the Prophet ﷺ had taken his leadership. Usayd's loyalty was firm, but never cruel.

And yet, for all his standing, there was no love of position in him. When some of the Ansar later felt the sting of being passed over, the Prophet ﷺ told them plainly that after him they would see others preferred and given positions over them, and he told them to be patient until they met him at the Hawd, his fountain on the Day of Judgment. The Ansar had supported the Prophet ﷺ seeking the pleasure of Allah, not the rewards of this world. Usayd lived to see exactly that time, when the Ansar were

forgotten, and he did not change. He had taken the Prophet ﷺ at his word: be patient until you meet me there.

There is one more moment, and it may be the most important of his life after the garden. When the Prophet ﷺ died, Madinah was dangerously fragile. Some of the Ansar argued that with the Prophet ﷺ gone, leadership in their city should return to them, and Aws and Khazraj, the old wound, could have torn open again. It was Usayd, in the gathering of Banu Sa'idah, who calmed everything. He reminded his people of what none could deny: the Prophet ﷺ was himself a migrant, so his successor should be from the Muhajirun too. Then he offered the resolution that settled it: just as we were the helpers, the Ansar, of the Prophet ﷺ, we will continue to be the helpers of his religion. The community united around one leader. A man with no hunger for power used all his influence, at the most volatile hour, to give the leadership away and hold the ummah together.

A debt, and a brother who paid it

Usayd ibn Hudayr never grew rich in Islam. He never used his rank to gather wealth, never sought this world. He died about twenty years after the migration, and Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) prayed over him and wept. The companions had prayed over many of their brothers, but the weight of Umar's sorrow at this funeral told you who Usayd was.

And then comes the detail that says everything. When Usayd died, he was in debt: four thousand dirhams, owed for dates he had taken to feed people. Umar, now the leader of the believers, could have waved the debt away or paid it from the public treasury, and no one would have objected. Instead he arranged with the creditors to pay it himself, in four yearly installments, and sold off his own possessions to do it. It took him three full years,

because Umar himself owned almost nothing, little more than the responsibilities of his office and whatever food he could find for a day. So the leader of the Muslims sold his own things, slowly, over three years, to honour a man who had died owing money he had spent feeding others. This is the brotherhood the Prophet ﷺ had built: two men, neither of whom held on to this world, bound by something that outlasted both their lives.

What Usayd's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read about Usayd and feel only wonder, the spear planted in the ground, the seven wounds, the angels descending to his voice, and to leave him there, admired and distant. But his life is not a marvel to look at. It is a question put to your own heart.

Begin with the thing that started it all. A few lines of the Qur'an changed Usayd completely, because his heart was open and unguarded when he heard them. The same words are in front of you. The difference between Usayd and the proud men of Makkah was not the strength of the evidence; it was the veil of arrogance over the heart. So the first question is uncomfortable and necessary: when you read the Qur'an, or hear it, is anything reaching you, or is there a veil? You cannot manufacture a soft heart, but you can stop hardening it. You can come to the words of Allah without pride, the way Usayd sat down in that garden, ready to accept the truth if it proved true. Ask Allah to remove whatever pride stands between you and His words, then sit with the Qur'an slowly enough to let it in.

Then take the three states in which Usayd was so present that he was sure of Paradise: reciting and listening to the Qur'an, sitting and listening to the Prophet ﷺ, and standing at a funeral imagining himself in the grave. None of those is heroic. They are

ordinary acts that most believers perform without their hearts ever showing up. The lesson is not that you must do extraordinary things. It is that you must be present in the ordinary ones. The next time you pray, the next time you read even a page, the next time you attend a janazah, you can choose to be there with your heart the way Usayd was, instead of going through the motions. Presence with Allah is available to you in acts you already do. That is a mercy.

Look, too, at what Usayd refused to want. He had every reason to crave position, and he used all his standing not to seize power but to give it away and unite the believers. He was patient about being forgotten in this world, because his eyes were fixed on meeting the Prophet ﷺ at the Hawd. This is sincerity, ikhlas, in its plainest form: to serve the cause of Allah for His sake, and to be at peace when the world overlooks you. Examine the places where you quietly keep score, where you want to be seen, thanked, preferred. Then, in one of them, do the good and let it go unnoticed, for Allah alone, the way Usayd let his standing go.

And do not miss the brotherhood at the end. Usayd died owing money he had spent on others, and a brother sold his own possessions over three years to clear it. Faith made these men responsible for one another in a way that cost them. You can carry a small piece of that today: pay a debt you have been avoiding, ease a burden for someone who would never ask, give something for the sake of Allah that no one will trace back to you.

A man walked into a garden with a spear, sure of himself, sent to silence the truth. He walked out a believer, and spent the rest of his life present before his Lord, generous with his people, and at peace with being forgotten by the world because he was waiting to be remembered by Allah. May Allah be pleased with Usayd ibn

Hudayr, soften our hearts to His words as He softened his, and gather us with him at the fountain of the Prophet ﷺ.

This chapter follows the account of Usayd ibn Hudayr (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (33:23). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

As'ad ibn Zurara

The First of Madinah

There are companions whose names fill the books, whose words we still repeat, whose lives are mapped out year by year. And then there are companions who left almost nothing behind in writing, not one reliable hadith, not a single line of memoir, and yet without whom the whole story would have a hole nothing could fill. As'ad ibn Zurara (may Allah be pleased with him) is the second kind. He laid a foundation and then was gone before the building rose on it. He did the quiet work that made everything else possible, and he did not live to see what it became.

If you want to understand how Islam came to have a city, a place where the call could finally be raised aloud and the Prophet ﷺ could walk in safety, you have to begin with a young man in Yathrib who said yes before anyone else in that city did.

A young man of Banu Najjar

He was As'ad, son of Zurara, of the tribe of Banu Najjar. His father had died before Islam. His mother was a woman named Su'ad bint Rafi', and she too was of Banu Najjar, as was almost everyone close to him. He had two brothers, Sa'd and Mas'ud, and two sisters, and every one of them would become Muslim after him. His mother accepted Islam as well. They lived quiet lives, mentioned only in passing in the histories, a line here saying that this one was at Badr, a line there and nothing more.

He was the only prominent one among them, and even his prominence was the prominence of a small town, not of an empire.

Banu Najjar was a sub-tribe of the Khazraj, and to grasp who As'ad was you have to remember what Yathrib was. Two great tribes, the Aws and the Khazraj, had worn themselves out in generations of warfare. So many of their fathers had killed one another that the old chiefs were mostly gone, and leadership fell early onto the shoulders of the young. The Khazraj had many large sub-tribes, and one of the largest was Banu Najjar. As'ad was married to a woman of that same tribe, Umaira bint Sahl, and they had three young daughters. He was a father, and he was barely more than a boy himself.

There was something in him, though, that older men noticed. He was known for wisdom that did not match his years, for gentleness, for good character. He was not hot-headed. He looked for peace and reconciliation rather than for a fight, which in a city exhausted by feuding was a rare and valuable thing. Some of the histories suggest he may never really have given himself to idol worship at all, that he leaned toward the worship of one God his whole life. Whatever the truth of that, he had no deep attachment to the religion of his forefathers. The people of Yathrib had the opposite temperament to the people of Makkah: where Makkah clung to the ways of its ancestors, Yathrib was tired of them.

The relationship that ran beneath everything

There is a thread here that is easy to miss, and it runs underneath the whole story. The Prophet ﷺ had a connection to Banu Najjar by blood. His grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, whose given name was Shaybah, was the son of Hashim and a woman named Salma bint

Amr, and Salma was of Banu Najjar. Hashim had died on a trading journey, in Gaza, while Salma carried his child, and so Shaybah was born in Yathrib and spent his early childhood there before being brought to Makkah. That childhood left a tie, an affection for the tribe of his grandmother.

So when the Prophet ﷺ would one day call Banu Najjar his maternal uncles, this is what he meant. Long before As'ad was born, Allah had already woven a line of kinship between the Messenger ﷺ and the very tribe that would receive him. None of them could have seen the shape of it at the time. That is usually how it is with the things Allah arranges. The pieces are set in place long before anyone understands the picture.

The first to say yes

By about the year 620, roughly ten years after the Prophet ﷺ first received revelation, As'ad had been made the chief of Banu Najjar. He was perhaps eighteen, nineteen, twenty years old. Take the most generous estimate and call him twenty. He was, on the measure of his people, a notable chief, which obliged him to represent them at the seasons of Hajj, at the festivals, in the meetings that mattered.

His first brush with the name of Muhammad ﷺ came in an unlikely place. He and another man, Dhakwan ibn Abd, had travelled to Makkah to resolve a dispute, and they sought the help of Utbah ibn Rabi'ah, one of the elders of Makkah and one of the staunchest enemies of the Prophet ﷺ, a man who would later die opposing him at Badr. Utbah spoke of the Prophet ﷺ in mockery, in scorn. But As'ad, listening past the insult, could make out what was actually being described: a call to the oneness of God, an extension of the true way of Ibrahim. The enemy, in his hatred, had introduced him to the thing he hated. It happens that

way more often than people expect. Sometimes the loudest opponents of the truth are the ones who first carry word of it to a waiting heart.

Then came the season of Hajj, and the Prophet ﷺ moving among the pilgrims, looking for anyone who would give him a hearing. He came upon six young men, and among them was As'ad. The Prophet ﷺ asked them, "Are you the allies of the Jews of Madinah?" They said yes. He said, "Sit, let me speak with you." And as he spoke to them of Islam, the thought that passed among them was this: let us be the ones to reach this prophet before those others do. We knew a prophet was coming. Let us hasten to him.

Among six, there is always one who gives voice to what the rest are feeling. That one was As'ad. He was the youngest, and yet they looked to him. He was the one they trusted. He was the first to extend his belief to the Prophet ﷺ, the first to give his allegiance. The one who points the way to good, the Prophet ﷺ would teach, has a share in every good that follows from it. Measure, then, what was gathering on the shoulders of a twenty-year-old when he was the first of his city to say yes.

Six became twelve, and twelve became seventy

Those six went home and brought others. The next season, twelve men came to pledge themselves to the Prophet ﷺ at Aqabah. This was the first pledge. They asked him to send someone back with them to teach them their religion, and he sent Mus'ab ibn Umayr.

What Mus'ab and As'ad did in Yathrib in the months that followed is one of the quiet miracles of the seerah. Mus'ab was the stranger; As'ad was the one who knew every door. As'ad took

him into his home, calmed the leaders of the city, brought him to the houses he needed to enter, set the stage for him to teach. Picture the two of them moving from quarter to quarter, the blessing that must have walked with them, the angels that must have followed them, until Islam had been carried to nearly every household in Yathrib. Most accepted. Some refused and kept their old ways. But the city was changed.

When the next Hajj came, the twelve had become seventy. This was the second pledge of Aqabah. And when the moment came for someone to lay out plainly what this pledge would cost, it was As'ad who stood. As the long narration of Jabir in the collection of Muslim records, a man rose to warn the seventy that by taking in this man they were severing every tie with the Arabs of Makkah and with every outside power, that all of them would now come against them, that they stood to lose everything of this world. He told them, in effect: if you mean to walk away, walk away now, that is better before Allah than to take this pledge and then abandon your prophet. And when they asked what they would have in return, the answer was Paradise. He was the first to put out his hand again to reaffirm it, and the people followed him.

Think of it. A young man, telling grown men to count the cost of ruin with their eyes open, and then leading them into it for the sake of Paradise. No wonder some of them were anxious, no wonder they wondered whether they could really hand this trust over. And yet As'ad spoke with such confidence, such love, that he carried them. That day the Prophet ﷺ divided the seventy into groups and appointed twelve leaders over them, twelve naqibs. As'ad was made the naqib of Banu Najjar. First of six, first of the speakers, first among the leaders of his people.

The firsts that no one else could claim

With As'ad it is first after first after first. He was the first of Madinah to break with the idols. There had been a hesitation among the people; no one had yet dared. The idols still stood. As'ad was the one who went back to his people and destroyed them, and only after he had done it, and the heavens had not fallen on him, did the other chiefs feel safe enough to do the same. If anyone was going to be struck down for it, it would have been him. He took that risk first so that others could follow without fear.

And then there is the matter of the Friday prayer, which moves me every time. Jumu'ah had not yet been legislated. The Prophet ﷺ was still struggling to survive in Makkah; there was no congregation there. The Jewish tribes of Yathrib kept Saturday, the Christians kept Sunday, and it was As'ad, in Yathrib, who first gathered the believers on the day of Friday, every single week, to remember Allah and to pray two units together in congregation behind Mus'ab. This was before the command of Jumu'ah came down, before the prayer was even fixed at the lengths we know. He simply saw that the believers needed to gather, and he gathered them. The scholars of the Shafi'i school later took the number of those who prayed with him, forty, as the minimum for a valid Friday prayer, drawing their ruling from the men As'ad assembled in that open land.

There is a scene the histories preserve that holds the whole meaning of his life in a few words. A man named Ka'b would walk his blind, aged father to the prayer. Every time the old man heard the call for Jumu'ah, he would say, "O Allah, forgive As'ad. O Allah, have mercy on As'ad. O Allah, be pleased with As'ad." The son had no idea who this was; he had never met the man. One day he asked why his father prayed for As'ad each time the call

to Friday prayer was raised. And the old man said, "My son, the first to gather us on the day of Friday, before the call to prayer even existed, was As'ad ibn Zurara." By then Madinah was a great city and thousands came to the prayer each week, and most had never heard the name of the man who first gathered forty people in an empty field. But the old ones remembered. We forget our elders quickly, even the ones still among us, even the ones who prayed in a parking lot before there was a masjid. The old man had not forgotten. And so, every Friday, he asked his Lord to be pleased with the boy who started it all.

The land he had already made holy

When the Prophet ﷺ finally made his hijrah and came toward the city, As'ad had set the whole scene for his arrival. The Prophet ﷺ wished to renew his bond with his maternal uncles of Banu Najjar, and he reached for them again and again, praising them, drawing near to them, as a man returns to the family he had not grown up among. As he entered, the people of Madinah lined the path, calling their greetings, each tribe begging him to stop and stay with them. Banu Salim asked him to pray with them, and he did, leading his first Jumu'ah among them in what is now a known masjid. Then he mounted his camel again and let it walk, telling the people that Allah would guide it to the place it was meant to kneel.

And the camel knelt in a garden, an open piece of land held in trust for two orphan boys, Sahl and Suhayl, under the guardianship of a man of Banu Najjar. The Prophet ﷺ called the boys and offered to buy the land. They said, "O Messenger of Allah, no, take it as a gift, we want nothing from you." But he refused to take it for nothing, and bought it from them at a high price. Remember how orphans were treated then, handed a few

dates and turned out, their property eaten up by stronger men. That is why the Qur'an warns so sharply against devouring the wealth of the orphan, and here was the Prophet ﷺ, the orphan himself, paying full value to two orphan boys for the ground his masjid would stand on.

And here is the thing that catches in the throat. That very ground, the spot where the Prophet's Masjid would rise, was the place where As'ad had been gathering the believers for Friday prayer before the Prophet ﷺ ever arrived. The empty field of his quiet congregations became the holiest mosque in Madinah. He had, without knowing it, been praying on the ground that Allah had already chosen. This is the loyalty of the Messenger ﷺ: if you did something for him and lived long enough, he would point you out and praise you; and if you died and people forgot you, he would revive your mention. As'ad's mention lives on in the very stones.

Gone before the harvest

He did not live to see it. While they were still building the masjid, As'ad fell ill with something terrible in his throat, a swelling so severe that they treated it by cauterising it, the harshest remedy they had. He grew sicker, and Allah decreed that he would not be part of what he had built. He died in the very first year of the hijrah, before Badr, before the masjid was even finished. He never saw a Ramadan in Madinah; fasting was made obligatory only the next year. He set the entire stage and then left before the play began. We have not a single sound hadith from him. The man who saw the first pledge and the first congregation and the first breaking of the idols died too soon to narrate any of it.

The Prophet ﷺ himself washed him, shrouded him in three garments, and prayed over him. This was, by the reckoning of

many scholars, the first funeral prayer of Islam, and certainly the first in Madinah. And his grave was the first dug in al-Baqi', the great cemetery in which the believer longs to be buried, near the family of the Prophet ﷺ, near his wives and companions and the righteous of this ummah. Imagine the cemetery empty, a single grave at its edge, the masjid still half-built, the people still praying toward Jerusalem, and one mound of earth marking the man who was first. Al-Baqi' is full now beyond counting. He was the first laid into it.

As'ad left no sons, so there is no lineage that traces back to him. He left three young daughters, and the Prophet ﷺ took them in. They lived among his wives; he sponsored them until they were grown and saw to their marriages himself. This is how the Messenger ﷺ answered the loyalty of As'ad ibn Zurara: he became a father to the children he left behind.

And there is one last scene, perhaps the most beautiful of all. After As'ad died, Banu Najjar came to the Prophet ﷺ in distress. They had lost their leader; they had no naqib, and not yet even a way to choose a successor. "O Messenger of Allah," they asked, "appoint for us a leader in his place." And the Prophet ﷺ said, "I will be your naqib." He would represent Banu Najjar himself. Some scholars saw in this the highest praise of As'ad: there was no fitting successor to him, and so the Messenger of Allah ﷺ stepped into his place.

What As'ad's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel a distant respect, then turn the page. That would miss what his life is for. As'ad ibn Zurara is not here to be admired from far off. His life is a question put to our own iman.

He gave himself to a work he would never see finished. He prepared a city, gathered a congregation, broke the idols, faced down the cost in front of seventy men, and then died in the first year, before the masjid was built, before the first Ramadan, with no hadith to his name and no son to carry it. By every worldly measure of legacy, he was robbed of the harvest. And yet not one grain of it was lost with Allah. This is the heart of what he teaches: that the reward of a deed is with the One you did it for, not in whether you live to enjoy its fruit. We want to see results, to watch our good ripen before our own eyes. As'ad shows us a higher way: to plant for the sake of Allah and trust Him with the harvest, even if it comes after we are in the grave. Ask yourself how much of your good you withhold simply because you will not be around to see it pay off.

He worked in near-total obscurity, and was content with it. The thousands who prayed in the Prophet's Masjid did not know whose field they prayed in. The man who gathered the first forty was a name only the old remembered. As'ad did not need to be remembered. He needed only to be of use to Allah. That is sincerity, ikhlas, the rarest treasure of the heart: to do the deed for Allah alone, content that He has seen it, even when no one else ever will. Somewhere there is good you could do that no one would ever credit to you. As'ad's life asks whether you would still do it, gladly, for Allah.

And he was first when being first was dangerous. He believed before his city believed. He broke the idols before anyone else dared, knowing that if lightning was going to fall, it would fall on him. He put his hand out to a hunted prophet and told seventy men to count the cost of ruin and accept it for the sake of Paradise. That is courage born of certainty, the certainty that Allah's promise is more real than the threats of men. In an

ordinary life now, you will rarely risk your blood for your faith. But you will be asked, again and again, to be the first in a room to do the right thing, to speak a truth no one else will speak, to leave a wrong everyone else is comfortable with. As'ad's faith asks whether your trust in Allah's promise is strong enough to make you the first to move, before it is safe, before it is popular, before anyone else has gone ahead of you.

So take one thing from him into your own days. Do one good deed for the sake of Allah that you will never get credit for. Begin one good thing you may not live to see completed, and leave the outcome to Allah. Be the first, just once, to do what is right while others hesitate. That is how the first of Madinah lived, in sincerity, in courage, in trust, planting a garden he would never walk in. May Allah be pleased with As'ad ibn Zurara, forgive him and accept from him, raise us upon a measure of his certainty, and gather us with the Prophet ﷺ and his companions in the Gardens of mercy.

This chapter follows the account of As'ad ibn Zurara (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

The Ansar

The Helpers Who Loved Him for Allah

To understand the Ansar (may Allah be pleased with them), you have to begin not with them, but with the loneliest hour in the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. You have to begin in a place of rejection, on a road covered in blood, so that you can feel the size of the mercy that came afterward.

Khadijah had died, the wife who comforted him when the revelation first came and who believed in him when no one else would. Abu Talib had died, the uncle whose protection had kept the worst of Quraysh at bay. And so the Prophet ﷺ went out to Ta'if, thinking that perhaps there were people in that proud city of leaders who would take him in. Instead he was met with the worst humiliation a human being can be met with. He was cursed and mocked and made to walk between two lines of children and the thugs of the city, who pelted him until the blood ran into his sandals and the stones gathered in his shoes. He walked mile after mile until he no longer recognized where he was.

And there, broken, he called out to his Lord with words that hold two things at once. First a fear about the unseen: as long as You are not angry with me, he said, I do not care, I will be patient. And then, beneath that, a very human and very real question. *Ila man takiluni*. To whom are You leaving me? My family has rejected me. My people have rejected me. The strangers are no better. Where do I go from here?

This chapter is the answer to that question. And the wisdom of Allah is woven all through it, that He let His Prophet ﷺ taste this unprecedented cruelty from one people just before he would taste an unprecedented love from another.

The dream of green, and the city that said no

The Prophet ﷺ had seen a dream of a place of greenery, and the landscape of Ta'if resembled it, so he tried Ta'if first. But Ta'if was a place of pride, of chiefs and wealth, of people who felt they had everything and needed nothing. Ta'if said no.

There was another place, far poorer and farther from Makkah, called Yathrib: a scattered settlement of perhaps forty-six encampments, like small military bases, whose chiefs had largely killed one another off in generations of fighting. To the worldly eye it offered nothing, and the advice of any sensible person would have been simple: do not waste your breath on people like that, for even if they believe, what can they possibly give you?

But the Prophet ﷺ never looked past people. Ta'if was his hardship, his *usrah*; Yathrib would become his ease, his *yusrah*. The proud city that refused him is today visited by only a few; the poor settlement that took him in became al-Madinah, one of the most beloved cities on the face of the earth. That reversal is the whole story in miniature: the world looked at the Ansar and saw nothing, and Allah looked at them and saw the people who would carry His Prophet ﷺ.

Six young men in the valley

It was the eleventh year after the revelation began, and Makkah was sure the matter was finished. Every pathway had been cut; where could this man possibly go? In the season of Hajj the

Prophet ﷺ moved among the tribes gathered from across Arabia, with Abu Bakr and Ali (may Allah be pleased with them) at his side, the first man and the first youth to believe. He would approach a gathering, ask politely to be heard, and meet the same wall every year. Some ignored him. Some listened a moment out of courtesy and walked away. Some set impossible conditions. Rejection after rejection.

Then, at Mina, he saw six young men with no elder among them, from that disturbed place in the middle of nowhere, Yathrib. He went to them, sat with them, and asked if they would listen. They were not proud men; they said, of course. He spoke to them of the oneness of God and of the message he carried, and when he learned they were from Yathrib, he noted that they were neighbours of the Jewish tribes who had settled there, tribes that had long spoken of a prophet who was to come. The young men looked at one another. Everything this man was saying lined up with what they had been hearing for years. And one of them, As'ad ibn Zurarah, said the sentence that changed their lives: why do we not race them to this, and embrace this prophet before they do?

It looked like a small thing. It was the hinge of history. They returned the next year with six more, twelve men in all, and pledged themselves to him: that they would not associate any partner with Allah, would not steal, would not commit adultery, would not kill their children, would not slander, and would not disobey in what is right. The very essence of the faith. The Prophet ﷺ sent Mus'ab ibn Umayr (may Allah be pleased with him) back with them to teach the religion. Within a single year, it is reported, every household in that city had learned the faith and was waiting for him. The whole town was ready before he ever arrived.

A profitable transaction

The following Hajj, seventy-three of them came. They met in secret, by night, behind the place of the stoning, for if Makkah learned that so large a group had come to pledge to him there would be bloodshed. The Prophet ﷺ came to them with his uncle al-Abbas, who pulled the matter open before them. Are you sure about this? If you are not equal to it, turn back now, it is no shame. We are his family. We can keep him.

They refused to turn back. They understood exactly what they were taking on, and said to him plainly: by taking you in, we make enemies of everyone. Our fragile alliances will shatter. Makkah will come for us, and others will come for us, and we are not only taking you, we are taking in a whole community of refugees with you. What do we get in return?

The Prophet ﷺ did not promise them a great city, or a famous mosque, or a legacy in the books, or that their town would one day be the heart of an empire. He said one thing. *You get Paradise*. That is all. No worldly reward, because they were not in it for the world, and so there was no point in naming a worldly reward at all.

And they said: that is a profitable transaction. We will take it. We will take you in, follow you, give you everything, and we want nothing of this world in return.

There was something in these people. Our mother Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) explained it best. She spoke of the Day of Bu'ath, the war that had killed off the chiefs of the two tribes of Yathrib, the Aws and the Khazraj, and said it was a day Allah had given as a gift to His Messenger ﷺ. Because of that war the people were broken, their leaders dead, every one of them carrying wounds, exhausted by fighting they had only inherited

from their fathers and no longer believed in. The pride had been beaten out of them. They were a humbled people, and a young people, and humbled young hearts can receive a prophet in a way that proud old ones cannot. Makkah was rich and felt invincible and could not accept anything that threatened its world. Yathrib had already learned that this world, when all you do with it is fight and bury your dead, holds no sweetness at all.

The sweetness of faith

In Sahih al-Bukhari there is a chapter on faith, and in it a narration of Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him), who was himself one of the Ansar; al-Bukhari knew precisely whose narration to choose. The Prophet ﷺ said that there are three qualities, and whoever has them has tasted the sweetness of faith: that Allah and His Messenger ﷺ are more beloved to him than anything else; that he loves a person only for the sake of Allah; and that he would hate to return to disbelief the way he would hate to be thrown into the fire.

Then, in the very next chapter, al-Bukhari places a second narration of Anas, and the placement is itself a teaching. The Prophet ﷺ said that to love the Ansar is a sign of faith, and to dislike them a sign of hypocrisy. The scholars say what al-Bukhari is quietly pointing to is this: there is no group who embodied that sweetness of faith like the Ansar. Their love of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ surpassed everything else almost at once. They loved the Prophet ﷺ not for his eloquence, not because he was a Makkan, not for his genius or beauty or manners, but for one reason only, because they understood that Allah had sent him. And they loved those who came with him because the One they loved and the Messenger they loved had told them to. Nothing on earth was going to make them go back.

Through Uhud, through every trial, every force that tried to pull them away from the Prophet ﷺ failed, because they had no interest whatsoever in returning to what they were before.

Once, Ghaylan ibn Jarir asked Anas whether the name "the Ansar," the Helpers, was something they had called themselves, a rallying cry, or whether Allah had named them. Anas answered: rather, Allah named us. What a name to be given by your Lord, and it carries an echo. When Isa, peace be upon him, stood with the world turned against him and a small band at his side, he called out, *who are my helpers for Allah?* And his disciples answered, *we are God's helpers.*

You who believe, be God's helpers. As Jesus, son of Mary, said to the disciples, 'Who will come with me to help God?' The disciples said, 'We shall be God's helpers.' Some of the Children of Israel believed and some disbelieved: We supported the believers against their enemy and they were the ones who came out on top.

QUR'AN 61:14

The Prophet ﷺ likened the twelve who first came to him to those disciples. Isa, peace be upon him, lifted from a world that had turned on him, had asked, *where are my helpers?* And the Prophet ﷺ at Ta'if had asked, *to whom are You leaving me?* The Ansar were the answer Allah sent. So great was the Prophet's love for them that he said: if all the people went one way and the Ansar went down a valley, he would go down the valley of the Ansar; and were it not that he was, by his nature, a migrant among the Muhajirun, he would have wished to be called one of them, for there was no people he would rather have belonged to.

A story of love

The story of the Ansar with the Prophet ﷺ is, from beginning to end, a story of love. When the Muhajirun arrived in Madinah, stripped of home and family, the Ansar received them not as a burden but as celebrities. Come to my house. No, come to mine. It was not staged and not forced; their hearts were genuinely full, because they had tasted the sweetness of faith and so they loved the people of faith. When Abdur-Rahman ibn Awf (may Allah be pleased with him) was paired with Sa'd ibn ar-Rabi' (may Allah be pleased with him), Sa'd offered him half of everything he owned, the better half; Abdur-Rahman, a proud merchant, thanked him and asked only to be shown the marketplace. The Ansar gave the migrants the better part of their houses and food, and sometimes went hungry so their guests could eat. When the Prophet ﷺ proposed they merely share their date palms, they argued with him, trying to give more than he would allow. He had to temper their generosity.

And their love grew precise. Ibn Hajar notes that they studied his habits to learn what foods he liked, so they could set those aside from their farms for him. They even learned which of his homes he was happiest in, and timed their gifts to arrive when he was there: the attention of people in love. Allah could have praised them for their generosity, but listen to how He chose to describe them instead:

Those who were already firmly established in their homes [in Medina], and firmly rooted in faith, show love for those who migrated to them for refuge and harbour no desire in their hearts for what has been given to them. They give them preference over themselves, even if they too are poor: those who are saved from their own souls' greed are truly successful.

QUR'AN 59:9

The Prophet ﷺ, for his part, told them he loved them, again and again, the way you should tell those you love for Allah's sake. Once, seeing the women and children of the Ansar, he stood and swore three times that they were among the most beloved of people to him. On Eid he would not simply pray and go home; he would go around Madinah greeting them, because he knew it was not Eid for them until they had seen their Prophet ﷺ. And his love showed most in his grief: he hated for the Ansar to suffer casualties in battle. At Khandaq, as they dug the trench, starving and covered in mud while the hypocrites taunted that this prophet had ruined their lives, the Ansar answered by singing their pledge to stay with him until the end. And the Prophet ﷺ, watching these young people who had given up everything, raised his hands: *O Allah, there is no life except the life of the Hereafter, so honour the Ansar and the Muhajirun, and forgive them both.*

The tent at Hunayn

The test of that love came at its sharpest after Makkah was conquered. The Prophet ﷺ had returned, victorious, to the city of his birth and of Khadijah, the place he loved and had only left because its people drove him out. After the battle of Hunayn that followed, he began distributing the spoils, and much of it went to the people of Makkah and to those who had only just accepted Islam, men whose faith was still new and needed softening.

The Ansar watched, and their hearts sank. They did not contemplate leaving the faith; they would never. But they were hurt. We took him in. We loved him. Our swords are still wet with the blood we shed for him, and now he gives to the people of Makkah and seems to forget us. Is he going to stay there and

leave us? Some murmured, may Allah forgive the Messenger of Allah, the gentlest possible way of voicing pain.

So the Prophet ﷺ had them gathered, all of them, in one tent, and let no one else enter. Exhausted as he was from battle, he came in to find them crammed together, much as they had first crowded around him on the outskirts of Makkah ten years before, except that some of those first faces were now in their graves. He asked them: what is this that I have heard from you? And Anas notes, even here, that the Ansar did not know how to lie; the hurt simply showed on their faces.

Then he spoke to them, and his words took them apart and put them back together. Did I not come to you when you were lost, and Allah guided you through me? Were you not poor, and Allah enriched you through me? Were you not enemies, and Allah united your hearts through me? They could only answer: Allah and His Messenger have done us every favour. He said, will you not answer me back? You could say to me, truthfully: you came called a liar, and we believed you; abandoned, and we sheltered you; in need, and we gave you everything. You could mention all of that, and I would not deny it. But they were too shy to speak.

And then he asked them the only question that mattered. Are you not pleased that the people go home with their sheep and camels and spoils, and you go home with the Messenger of Allah? He was telling them he was coming with them, home to Madinah, not staying in Makkah. He raised his hands and prayed: *O Allah, have mercy on the Ansar, and the children of the Ansar, and the children of the children of the Ansar.* And the whole tent wept until their beards were soaked with tears. They had taken in a man they did not yet know, for nothing but Paradise. In ten years they had fallen entirely in love with him. And now all they wanted

in the world was Paradise and his companionship, and they had been given the promise of both.

They never changed, not even in victory. When he later offered them governance over a wealthy region, they answered that they would accept only if their brothers from the Muhajirun were given the same; otherwise they wanted no power at all, content to remain the helpers in the background. He told them, then, to be patient, for after him they would find others preferred over them, passed over precisely because of their selflessness. Be patient, he said, until you meet me at the Fountain. And in his final days, too weak to stand, a cloth bound around his feverish head, he climbed the pulpit one last time and made his last public request to the ummah: *take care of my Ansar*. They were, he said, the ones in whom he confided; they had fulfilled what was upon them, so accept the good from the good among them and overlook the faults of any who err.

What the life of the Ansar asks of our faith

It is easy to read the story of the Ansar and feel a warm admiration that costs us nothing. That would be to miss what their lives are actually asking of us. They are not a beautiful memory to be honoured. They are a question put to our own iman.

Start with why they are loved at all. The Prophet ﷺ said that whoever loves the Ansar loves them for their love of him ﷺ. Think of someone most precious to you, taken in by strangers who shelter and feed and protect them and ask nothing back. You would love those strangers forever, though you never met them. That is why a believer loves the Ansar: they did for the most beloved of all creation what we, reading the story of Ta'if and aching, only wish we could have done. We say, if only I had

been there, I would have protected him, though we do not actually know that our faith would have stood. They stood. So loving them is not sentimentality. It is a thermometer of the heart, which is why love of them is a sign of faith and dislike of them a sign of hypocrisy.

But the deeper thing they ask is about the *reason* for our love and our deeds. Their whole greatness rests on one foundation: they did it for Allah. They loved the Prophet ﷺ for Allah, not for what he could give them. They loved the refugees for Allah, finding no resentment in their chests even as their own resources thinned. And when they were offered the one thing every other people fights for, power, they handed it back, content to be like salt in a meal, because the love of this world had no grip on their hearts. That is the quality to take. Ask honestly how much of what you do is done to be seen and thanked and counted, and how much you could do the way the Ansar did, in the background, for Allah alone. They were promised Paradise and nothing of this world, and called it a profitable transaction.

And notice what such people are spared. When the Khilafah passed to Abu Bakr in their own city, the city they had every worldly claim to lead, they did not rebel; one visit settled it, because there was no hunger for the world in them to be wounded. The love of this world is what makes us bitter when we are passed over and anxious when we are not thanked. The Ansar were free of all of it. Contentment with Allah's decree is not weakness; it is the freest way a heart can live.

So carry one concrete thing from them into an ordinary day. Do one good deed this week that no one will ever know you did, and let it be for Allah alone. When you are overlooked or unthanked, hold your tongue and your heart steady, and remember the Ansar

who were content to be salt in the meal. And tell someone you love them for the sake of Allah, the way the Prophet ﷺ told the Ansar again and again that he loved them. That is the sweetness of faith, lived in private, and the door to it is still open. Allah named them the foremost, and beside them He named a third group, the only one we can still hope to join:

God will be well pleased with the first emigrants and helpers and those who followed them in good deeds, and they will be well pleased with Him: He has prepared Gardens graced with flowing streams for them, there to remain for ever. That is the supreme triumph.

QUR'AN 9:100

We cannot be of the Muhajirun, and we cannot be of the Ansar. But we can be of those who followed them in doing good. May Allah be pleased with the Ansar, and with the children of the Ansar, and with the children of their children, and may He make us among those who followed them in their excellence, gathered with His Prophet ﷺ at the Fountain, loving those whom He loves.

This chapter follows the account of the Ansar in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (61:14, 59:9, 9:100). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Mihja, Umayr, and Ubayda

The First Martyrs of Badr

There is a kind of greatness that history almost forgets. It does not leave behind volumes. It leaves behind a line, sometimes two, in the old books, and a reader who comes searching for more is left holding very little in his hands. And yet that one line, read slowly, can weigh more than a thousand pages, because of what it points to. It points to a man who was standing in the right place, on the right day, with the right heart, when the whole world changed.

These are three such men. Three of the earliest Muslims of Makkah, three who paid the price of the hijrah, and three who were among the first to fall on the day of Badr. The day the angels descended. The day the matter was made clear. To be a Companion of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was already an honour beyond reach. To be a Companion of Badr was higher still. And to be among the very first to give your life on that day, before anyone else, that is a station the historians could barely describe, even as they confessed they knew almost nothing about the men who reached it.

The day the matter was decided

To understand these three, you have to understand the day that gathered them. Badr was not one battle among many. It was the day the believers and the disbelievers met for the first time on

open ground, the day the small and the weak stood against the large and the armed, the day Allah sent His angels down to fight alongside His Messenger ﷺ. The best of the Companions were the Companions of Badr. The best of the angels, it was said, were the angels of Badr. It was the day the criterion came down, the day everything that had been blurred was made clear, the line between truth and falsehood drawn once and for all in the sand of a valley.

The Qur'an itself would mark it forever, naming it not by its place but by its meaning:

Know that one-fifth of your battle gains belongs to God and the Messenger, to close relatives and orphans, to the needy and travellers, if you believe in God and the revelation We sent down to Our servant on the day of the decision, the day when the two forces met in battle. God has power over all things.

QUR'AN 8:41

The day of the decision. The day the two forces met. If the reward of every believer who fought on that day was multiplied, then think of the reward of those who did not merely fight but died, and of those who died first, before the rest, when the dying had only just begun. These three reached that.

Mihja: the first to fall

The first man to lose his life on the day of Badr, the first martyr of the whole encounter, was a man named Mihja (may Allah be pleased with him). And here is the strange and humbling thing. You can comb through the books for him and find almost nothing. You would expect that the first martyr of the most important battle in the history of this religion would have pages devoted to

him, his sayings preserved, his family traced, his face described. Instead there is a line or two. He arrived at the highest honour and left the smallest record, and somehow that fits him.

What we do know begins in slavery. Mihja was a slave in Makkah who accepted Islam, and like the other slaves who believed early, he was made to suffer for it. We are used to the story of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him) buying the persecuted and setting them free. But it was not Abu Bakr who freed Mihja. It was Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him). And from that day Mihja was bound to Umar, loyal to him for the rest of his life.

The few lines we have about him are not about his lineage or his wealth, because he had neither. They are about his worship. He was remembered as a great worshipper, a man who would stand in prayer at night alongside Umar, one of those who competed with the most righteous in their devotion to Allah. That is the whole portrait: a freed slave who prayed in the dark. And there is a narration that the Prophet ﷺ named the best of all black men and women as three, and that Mihja was counted in the company of Luqman and Bilal. Think of that. A man the city had once owned and beaten, raised by the tongue of the Messenger ﷺ into the highest company.

On the day of Badr, the account that reaches us says that he kept repeating a single phrase, over and over, as the battle began. To my Lord I am returning. To my Lord I am returning. He said it until an arrow found him, and he became the first to fall. What a thing to be saying with your last breath. Not a boast, not a cry of fear, but a statement of where he was going. He had spent his nights returning to his Lord in prayer, and now he returned to Him completely. The first soul to be carried up from the field of Badr

was the soul of a freed slave who had told everyone, including himself, exactly where he was headed.

Ubayda: the older cousin who came forward

The second of the three was a man of a very different beginning. Ubayda ibn al-Harith (may Allah be pleased with him) was a cousin of the Prophet ﷺ, and one of the earliest to believe, accepting Islam before the believers ever gathered in the house of al-Arqam. He was about ten years older than the Messenger ﷺ, which means that when revelation first came, Ubayda was already a man of fifty. He did not hesitate at his age. He went straight to the Prophet ﷺ and gave himself to him and his message.

His standing in Quraysh meant he was spared the worst of the torture that fell on men like Mihja. But he was not spared the long ordeal. He endured the boycott, the years when the Prophet's clan was cut off from food and trade and herded into a barren valley, and he stayed in Makkah through all of it. When the time came, he made the hijrah with the Prophet ﷺ. And in Madinah he was trusted early with real responsibility. He is counted among the first to carry the banner in Islam, said to be the second flag-bearer after Hamza, leading sixty of the Muhajirin under his command.

At Badr, before the two armies closed, came the duels. It was the custom that champions would step out and fight one to one before the general battle began, and from the side of the Muslims three men came forward: Hamza, Ali, and Ubayda (may Allah be pleased with them). Three of the believers, against three of the leaders of Quraysh, the men Utba ibn Rabi'a, al-Walid ibn Utba, and Shayba ibn Rabi'a. An old man of sixty, stepping into single combat at the front of the line. Hamza and Ali finished their

opponents and were unharmed. Ubayda was the one who was wounded, struck a grievous blow in that opening duel. Hamza and Ali came to his aid and finished the fight, and Ubayda was carried out of the fight alive, but badly hurt.

He survived Badr itself. He did not survive the road home. As the believers travelled back, his wound took him, and he died at a place called al-Safra, not far from the battlefield. He is not buried among the other martyrs of Badr. His grave sits alone in that place, the lonely resting spot of the first man wounded on that great day. And there is a narration that long afterward, when the Companions passed by al-Safra, they caught the scent of musk and asked the Prophet ﷺ about that fragrance. He answered them with a question that was its own answer: how could it be otherwise, when Ubayda is buried there? An old man who came forward when younger men might have hung back, and the earth that held him was perfumed for it.

Umayr: the boy who would not be turned away

The third was the youngest, and his story is the one most likely to bring a tear. Umayr ibn Abi Waqqas (may Allah be pleased with him) was the younger brother of Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, and he had embraced Islam very young. When the army set out for Badr, Umayr was still a boy, a young teenager, and the Prophet ﷺ looked at him and sent him away. He was too young. This was no place for a child.

But Umayr did not go quietly. He wept. He begged. He cried to be allowed to stay among those who would fight, because more than anything in the world he did not want to miss this. The other boy his age might have been relieved to be sent home to safety. Umayr was devastated by it. And as he stood there crying,

showing how deeply this mattered to him, the Prophet ﷺ relented and let him remain, despite his years.

Stop and consider what the boy was crying for. He was not crying to prove himself, or to win a name, or to come home a hero with stories to tell. The histories preserve the shape of his longing in a single idea: he did not want to miss out on Paradise. He understood, young as he was, that this day was worth more than anything the rest of a long life could ever offer him. A grown man might calculate the risk. This boy saw only the prize, and the prize was Jannah, and he could not bear to be turned away from the door. He stayed. And he was killed at Badr, a young teenager among the martyrs of the greatest day.

So Badr held them all at once. The old man of sixty stepping into a duel he would not walk away from. The freed slave repeating that he was returning to his Lord until an arrow made it true. And the boy weeping at the thought of being sent home, because home meant missing the only thing he had ever truly wanted. Three lives, three beginnings, one ending, and one reward.

What history kept and what it let go

It is worth sitting with how little we are given. Of the first martyr of Badr, a line. Of the others, not much more. The men who comb the books for these three come away with their hands nearly empty, and at first that feels like a loss, as though something has been taken from us that we deserved to have.

But there is another way to see it. These three did not live for the record. They lived for Allah, and they died for Him, and the thinness of their biographies is itself a kind of teaching. They are not remembered for what they built, or said, or owned, because they built and said and owned almost nothing the world counts.

They are remembered for one thing only: that when the day of decision came, they were there, and they gave everything, and they asked for nothing back. The smallness of the line and the greatness of the station do not contradict each other. They are the whole point. A man can be unknown to history and beloved to his Lord, and of the two, only one matters.

When Quraysh listed the names that filled their gatherings, none of these three would have been on it. A slave, an aging cousin, a boy. And when Allah gathered the first martyrs of the day He Himself had named the day of decision, these were the names He chose.

What the lives of Mihja, Umayr, and Ubayda ask of our faith

It is easy to read about martyrs and feel only distance, as though their road has nothing to do with the small, ordinary days we actually live. That would be the wrong lesson. These three did not become who they were on the field of Badr. They became who they were in the years before it, in the quiet, in the nights, in the choosing. Badr only revealed what they had already built. Their lives are not a story about dying. They are a question about how we are living right now.

Begin with Mihja. A freed slave with nothing the world values, and what filled his life was prayer in the dark and a phrase on his lips: to my Lord I am returning. He had no audience for those nights. No one was counting his prayers, no one would have remembered them, and that is exactly what made them his. That is ikhlas, sincerity, the rarest and most precious thing a heart can hold: to do the deed for Allah alone, in private, content that He has seen it even when no one else ever will. You do not need a battlefield for this. You need one prayer, tonight, that no one

knows about, offered to Allah and to no one else. That is the whole of Mihja's secret, and it is open to you.

Then there is Ubayda, the old man who stepped forward when he had every excuse to stay back. He was fifty when he believed and sixty when he fought, and at an age when most men are spending what is left of their strength carefully, he spent his all at once, for Allah. His life asks a hard question of anyone who tells themselves they are too old, too tired, too late, too far along to give themselves fully to their Lord. There is no age at which Allah stops accepting the heart that turns to Him. The scent of musk on a lonely grave is the answer to every soul that thinks its best days, and its best deeds, are behind it.

And there is Umayr, the boy who wept at being turned away from the door of Paradise. Ask yourself, honestly, when you last wanted nearness to Allah the way that child wanted it. We guard our comfort. We are quietly relieved to be excused from the harder forms of devotion. He was the opposite: relieved of danger and heartbroken by it, because he could see what was really being offered. That clarity is not reserved for children or for the people of Badr. It is available to anyone willing to look past this short life and see what is actually at stake. Let his tears shame our lukewarmness a little, and then let them move us. Want Jannah the way he wanted it. Let that longing change one decision you make today.

What ties the three together is the thing every believer most needs and most struggles to hold: trust in Allah's promise before the reward is in view. The slave returning, the old man advancing, the boy pleading, all three acted on a certainty that what Allah has prepared is real and worth more than anything they were leaving behind. They could not see Paradise. They believed in it,

and they spent their lives on that belief, and they were right. That same promise is held out to you, on the same terms. So take one thing from these three into your ordinary week. Offer one act of worship that only Allah will know about, the way Mihja did. Refuse the excuse of being too late, the way Ubayda did. And let yourself want nearness to your Lord enough to be moved by it, the way Umayr did. May Allah be pleased with Mihja, Ubayda, and Umayr, the first to fall on the day of decision, and may He gather us, in whatever small measure of their sincerity He grants us, in the company of the martyrs of Badr.

This chapter follows the account of Mihja, Ubayda ibn al-Harith, and Umayr ibn Abi Waqqas (may Allah be pleased with them) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (8:41). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Umm Kulthum bint Uqbah ibn Abi Muayt

The Enemy's Daughter Who Chose Faith

There are people who come to faith from comfort, and people who come to it from hardship, and then there are people who come to it from inside the very house that is fighting against it. Umm Kulthum bint Uqbah ibn Abi Muayt (may Allah be pleased with her) was one of these. To understand what her belief cost her, and how unlikely it was, you have to begin not with her, but with her father, and with one of the ugliest scenes in the early life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

The day her father humiliated the Prophet

Picture the Prophet ﷺ praying in front of the Kaaba in Makkah. He is in the open, in the sight of his enemies, and they are watching him. The leaders of Quraysh are gathered, and Abu Jahl throws out a challenge to the men around him. Who, he asks, will take the filth of a slaughtered camel, its intestines and its waste, and dump it on the back of Muhammad ﷺ while he is in prostration, while he is in sujood before his Lord?

One man volunteered. His name was Uqbah ibn Abi Muayt. He went and gathered all of it, every foul part of the animal, and while the Prophet ﷺ was in sujood, he poured it across his back. The weight of it pressed the Prophet ﷺ down so that he could not rise from his prostration. And the elites of Quraysh, the men

who considered themselves the noblest of the Arabs, roared with laughter at the sight.

At home was a young girl, Fatimah (may Allah be pleased with her). This was after the death of her mother Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her), and she was a child who should never have had to witness anything like this done to her father. Word reached her of what was happening at the Kaaba. She went out, and she came to him in tears, and she began to clean the filth from his back. The Prophet ﷺ comforted her. He told her not to grieve, that Allah would give her father victory. And in that moment he made a supplication against some of those men, men who would later be killed at Badr.

That is the man Uqbah ibn Abi Muayt was: a man willing to descend to the lowest of the low to prove his arrogance and his enmity to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. So hold that picture in your mind, the laughter, the weeping girl, the father pressed into the dirt, and now think about the children growing up in the house of a man like that. Think about what they were taught, what they were nurtured upon, what they heard about the Prophet ﷺ at their own dinner table. They were raised to hate him.

Hope in the children of the enemies

Here is something easy to miss in the story of those years. The Prophet ﷺ never wrote off the families of his enemies. He carried hope for them, and he carried it especially for the next generation, for the children of the men who hated him most. He looked at the sons and daughters of his persecutors and he did not see them as extensions of their fathers. He saw souls that Allah could guide.

And out of all the houses in Makkah, the house of Uqbah ibn Abi Muayt became one of the clearest proofs of that hope. All six of his children came to Islam. All six. Al-Walid ibn Uqbah, who would later serve as a governor of Kufa under Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him). Ammarah. Khalid. Umm Hakim. Hind. Every one of them.

But one of them stands above the rest, and she is the one this chapter is about: Umm Kulthum bint Uqbah ibn Abi Muayt. She did not come to Islam late, in the crowd, after the matter was already decided. She came early, and she came alone, and she came at the worst possible time to come. She was, in fact, the one who preceded all of her siblings into the faith. The daughter of the man who had buried the Prophet ﷺ in filth would become one of the great women of his companionship.

She also carried a quiet thread of nobility on her mother's side. Her mother was Arwa bint Kurayz, and that made Umm Kulthum the half-sister, through the same mother, of Uthman ibn Affan (may Allah be pleased with him). So the woman whose father was among the foremost enemies of the Prophet ﷺ was, by blood, sister to one of the foremost believers.

The first woman to migrate alone

What truly set Umm Kulthum apart was not only that she believed, but when she believed and how she acted on it. She did not wait for the conquest of Makkah, when so many of the old enemies and their children finally came over once Islam had clearly won. She became Muslim at a deeply inconvenient moment, and then she did something no woman had done before her. She is known as the first woman to make hijrah alone, leaving her family's home with no husband and no one from her household beside her.

Sit with that for a moment. She was not married. There was no husband leading her out, no family caravan she was simply traveling along with. She was a single young woman from one of the most powerful tribes in Arabia, and she walked away from all of it to reach the Prophet ﷺ. This was around the time of Hdaybiyyah, not the famous migration from Makkah to Madinah years earlier. By Hdaybiyyah, the lines were drawn, the danger was real, and the cost of leaving was steep.

And it was steeper still because of the treaty itself. One of the conditions of Hdaybiyyah was that anyone who fled from Makkah to the Prophet ﷺ in Madinah would be sent back. We know the anguish this caused in the case of Abu Jandal (may Allah be pleased with him), who arrived in chains at the very moment the treaty was being settled, only to be returned. That was the agreement Umm Kulthum was walking straight into. She escaped, and she made her way to the Prophet ﷺ in Madinah anyway, the first woman to migrate alone, single, with no one from her family's house at her side, for no reason in the world except that she believed in Allah and in His Messenger ﷺ.

The verse that protected her

She did not arrive unnoticed. Her brothers, Ammarah and al-Walid, who were not yet Muslim, came after her to Madinah and stood before the Prophet ﷺ and demanded her back. Return our sister to us, they said, in accordance with the terms that were made between us.

Umm Kulthum protested. She went to the Prophet ﷺ and she made her case plainly. I am not like the men, she said. You know what they will do to me. They did not mean women like me when they made that condition with you. Her argument was sharp and true: the treaty had been struck with young fighting men in mind,

with all that returning a man meant in terms of tribal loyalties and battle. The men who wrote that condition were not thinking of her. She was a woman, vulnerable, with no one to protect her, and she knew exactly what awaited her if she were handed back.

The Prophet ﷺ was placed in a hard position, because he did not act on his own preference; he acted on revelation. And so revelation came down concerning her situation, in Surah Al-Mumtahanah:

You who believe, test the believing women when they come to you as emigrants- God knows best about their faith- and if you are sure of their belief, do not send them back to the disbelievers...

QUR'AN 60:10

Allah Himself settled the matter. The treaty did not bind the believers to return the believing women. When such women came as emigrants, they were to be examined, and if they were found to be true in their faith, they were not to be sent back to those who had rejected the truth. Allah rescued her through these words. She was allowed to remain in Madinah, and her brothers returned to Makkah without her.

Think about what that meant. A verse of the Qur'an, recited until the end of time, came down in connection with the stand of one young woman who had refused to let her family carry her back into disbelief. Her faith had been tested by the road she walked, and now Allah affirmed it from above the seven heavens.

What Allah gave her in Madinah

Consider how much certainty it took to do what she did, to pull herself out of a powerful home and a powerful tribe with nothing

to lean on but her belief. Then consider how Allah honored that certainty.

In Madinah she was married to Zayd ibn Harithah (may Allah be pleased with him), the beloved companion whom the Prophet ﷺ had raised as his own, and she bore him two children. Zayd was later killed as a martyr in the path of Allah. After him she married again, and then the Prophet ﷺ himself requested her hand on behalf of Abd al-Rahman ibn Awf (may Allah be pleased with him), one of the ten promised Paradise, and from him she had several children. After his death she was married to Amr ibn al-As (may Allah be pleased with him), and she died only about a month into that marriage.

Some of her children would go on to narrate hadith from her. So this woman, the daughter of Uqbah ibn Abi Muayt, ended her life having kept the companionship of the Prophet ﷺ, having been a wife to some of the greatest men of this religion, and having become a link in the chain that carried the words of the Prophet ﷺ to the generations after her. The girl raised to hate him was now woven into his household and his legacy.

There is a heavy and beautiful symmetry here. Her father had made the daughter of the Prophet ﷺ weep at the foot of the Kaaba. And the daughter of that same father grew up to embrace the Prophet's message and to become one of the cherished companions of the very man her father had tried to humiliate.

A long supplication at her grave

She passed away during the caliphate of her brother, Uthman ibn Affan (may Allah be pleased with him). It is reported that Uthman himself led her funeral prayer, and that he carried out her burial with his own hands. And after the prayer was finished, he was

seen standing for a long time over her grave, making supplication for her.

Picture that scene and let it settle. The man from whom the angels themselves felt shy, the man whose supplications Allah answered, stood over the grave of his sister and prayed for her, and would not leave. There are few sights in the histories more tender than that, a believing woman lowered into the earth, and one of the noblest companions of the Prophet ﷺ standing over her, unwilling to walk away, pouring out prayers on her behalf.

Her father is remembered among the people of the earth for his disbelief and his cruelty to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. We ask Allah that she be remembered among the most honored of the righteous, for what she sacrificed to become a believing woman, to become the first muhajirah in her circumstance, and to hold her faith when every tie of blood was pulling the other way.

What Umm Kulthum's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like hers and feel only a distant admiration, as though she belonged to a species of believer the rest of us could never be. That would miss the whole point. Her life is not a portrait to hang on a wall. It is a question pressed against our own iman.

The first thing she asks of us is this: do you believe because of the people around you, or in spite of them? Umm Kulthum had every reason, by the reckoning of this world, to stay a disbeliever. Her father, her tribe, her upbringing, her safety, her comfort, all of it pointed one way. She went the other way, alone, because she knew the truth was the truth regardless of who held it. Most of us inherit our faith from the people we love and lean on it as long as it is convenient. She tells us that faith is finally a thing

between you and Allah, and that no household, no family pressure, and no fear of what people will do should be allowed to stand between your heart and your Lord. Ask yourself honestly where you would have stood if belief had meant walking out of your own father's house with nothing.

The second thing she asks is about sincerity. She did not migrate because a husband dragged her along, the transcript is emphatic on this; she was not married, no one carried her out. She left for one reason only, that she believed in Allah and His Messenger ﷺ. That is ikhlas in its purest shape: an act done for Allah alone, with no human cause beneath it, no one to impress, no one even to accompany her. In our own lives the test is quieter but the same. How much of what we do for the faith is really for the eyes of people, for belonging, for approval? She shows us what it looks like to do something for Allah when there is no one else in the equation at all.

The third thing is trust in Allah's promise and contentment with His decree. She threw herself into uncertainty, walked into a treaty that should have sent her straight back, and made her stand with nothing to protect her but her conviction that Allah would not abandon a believing woman. And He did not. A verse came down to shield her. Then He gave her, one after another, a life rich beyond anything the house of Uqbah could have offered. What looked like a young woman throwing away her security on a doomed and dangerous choice was in truth the most successful path she could have taken. This is the promise that should change how we weigh our own decisions: what you risk for Allah, He does not waste. What you give up for His sake, He returns in a form better than what you let go of.

So carry one thing from her into an ordinary day. Make one choice this week for Allah alone that costs you something with the people around you, a small thing you have been avoiding because of what someone might think. Hold to a part of your faith that your circumstances are quietly pressuring you to drop. Trust, when the path of obedience looks frightening, that Allah will not hand over to ruin a heart that turned to Him. That is how the enemy's daughter became one of the firsts, in conviction, in sincerity, in trust, and that road is still open to anyone willing to walk even a few steps of it. May Allah be pleased with Umm Kulthum bint Uqbah ibn Abi Muayt, who chose Him over everything she had ever known, and may He grant us the courage to choose Him too.

This chapter follows the account of Umm Kulthum bint Uqbah ibn Abi Muayt (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (60:10). Names have been rendered in standard seerah spelling; where the lecture's account of her later marriages is partial, only what it states has been followed.

Zinneera and Aflah

The Tortured Ones

There are names in this religion that everyone knows, and there are names that almost no one does. We say Bilal, and a whole story rises in the mind: the rock on the chest, the desert sun, the one word repeated through cracked lips. But Bilal was not alone under that sun. Around him, in the same streets of Makkah, in the same years, there were others who were beaten and burned and dragged for the same word, and whose stories the books barely managed to hold. Some of them we know by a single name. Some we have lost entirely. Two of them are Zinneera and Aflah, and what little we have of them is enough to leave a mark on the heart that does not fade.

This is a chapter about people we owe a great debt to and know very little about. We have one line for them, sometimes two. But behind that line is a human being who put everything on the line in Makkah without seeing any light at the end of the tunnel, with no one in the world to protect them, so that we could one day inherit this faith in peace.

The ones the books could not hold

When you go back to the very first believers, the earliest of the early, a particular group stands apart: the enslaved, and those tortured because they were enslaved. They had the least to gain and the most to lose. A free man of Quraysh who accepted Islam

still had his tribe, his name, some shred of protection. An enslaved person who accepted Islam had nothing between their body and the cruelty of whoever owned them. They believed anyway.

Many of them we will never be able to name. Some left only a first name in the records, with no family, no lineage, nothing more. But Allah knows every one of their names, and that is a thing worth sitting with. There is a register kept in the heavens that does not lose a single soul, even when the books of men forget them. These were the forerunners, the foremost. And almost all of their stories run through one man, because that one man kept buying them back.

Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) used to walk through Makkah, and whenever he found a person being tortured for the sake of Allah, especially the enslaved, he would pay whatever the owner demanded and set them free. He did it again and again until it became the pattern of his life. People could not understand it. His own father said to him, in so many words, that these were weak people who could do nothing for him, that if he was going to spend his wealth freeing slaves he should free strong ones who would stand at his side. Abu Bakr answered that he was not seeking anything from them at all. He was seeking something else, from Someone else. He wanted only what was with Allah. He did not want to be repaid in this world by the people of this world. He wanted to be repaid by the Lord of the worlds, with a thing he had not even asked for.

Hold that frame in your mind, because it is the frame around both of the lives in this chapter. These two were not rescued because they were useful. They were rescued because a man loved Allah enough to spend on the helpless and expect nothing back. And

they themselves endured because they loved Allah enough to be beaten for Him and expect nothing back. The whole story turns on that single quality: doing for Allah, and looking to no one else.

Zinneera, and the sight that was taken

The first is a woman named Zinneera. We do not have her family name. We do not have her lineage. We have her faith, and we have what was done to her, and somehow that is enough to know her.

Zinneera was enslaved in Makkah, which meant she was not merely at the mercy of any cruel person who happened to pass. She was at the mercy of a particular man: Abu Jahl, of the Banu Makhzum. This is the same Abu Jahl whose savagery we already know from the death of the first martyr of this ummah. He carried a special hatred for Zinneera. He singled her out. There are narrations from more than one source about the unique, public, humiliating way he tortured this woman, this person who had no rank in society and no one to defend her.

He beat her until she went blind.

Sit with that for a moment before moving on. The blows did not stop at pain. They took her eyesight from her, in the open, in front of people, in the name of the idols of Makkah. And when she had been blinded, Abu Jahl found a way to make it worse. As people spoke about what had happened, he told them it was not his hand that had done this. It was the gods. It was the very idols she had rejected, he said, that had struck her blind in their anger. He turned his own cruelty into a sermon for his idols and laid the blame at her feet.

Imagine the strength it would take, in that condition, to answer him. She had been beaten into darkness for refusing these idols,

she held no position that anyone respected, and she was now being told that her blindness was the idols' revenge. And from that place she spoke. She said they were lying. By Allah, she said, the idols have no power. They do not benefit anyone. They do not harm anyone. There is no harm and no good that comes from them. All power belongs to Allah alone. All benefit comes from Him. Nothing happens except by His will.

This is the testimony of a woman who could no longer see the faces of the people mocking her, declared into a crowd that had just watched her lose her eyes. It is one of the purest statements of tawheed in the whole story of Makkah, and it came not from a scholar or a chief but from a blind, enslaved woman with nothing left but her certainty.

And then something happened that the narrations preserve plainly. When she said it, Allah returned her sight. She could see again.

The men who had been mocking her, who had just declared that the idols blinded her, now had to explain how she was seeing. They could not bring themselves to say it was a sign from Allah. So they said it was sorcery. They said this was nothing but the magic of Muhammad ﷺ, that her vision returned because of his spell. The same event that should have softened the hardest heart was twisted, by hearts already set against the truth, into one more accusation. What it actually was, of course, was a gift from Allah, an honoring of a righteous woman whose body they had broken but whose faith they could not touch.

Zinneera is named among those Abu Bakr freed, the woman who was tested in her very eyesight by the torture of Abu Jahl, and who answered that torture with a declaration that all power belongs to Allah.

Aflah, the twin of Bilal in torture

The second is a man, and the simplest way to describe him is this: he was tortured exactly the way Bilal was tortured, by the same hand. His name is Aflah, a name that itself carries the meaning of one who succeeds, one who prospers, one who attains. He lived up to it in the only way that finally counts.

Everything we know was done to Bilal was done to Aflah. He was tortured in the scorching heat of the day. He was forced to lie out naked in the desert with a heavy stone placed on his chest, a weight that came close to killing him where he lay. He was starved of food and water. He was kept from sleep. He was lashed in public, where everyone could see, so that the spectacle of his suffering might frighten others away from this religion. He was, in his body, Bilal's twin. The same fire was applied to him, by the same persecutor, for the same reason: he had said that he believed, and he would not take it back.

The last image we have of his torture is the hardest. The pagans tied a rope around his feet and around his neck, and they dragged his nearly lifeless body through the streets of Makkah, hauling him over the ground until he was at the very edge of death. That is the scene Abu Bakr came upon. And Abu Bakr did what he always did. He paid for Aflah's freedom and pulled him out of their hands.

Here, though, the two stories part. Bilal stayed with Abu Bakr in Makkah and went on with the community to Madinah, and we know the long, honored life that followed for him: the first to call the adhan, beloved of the Prophet ﷺ, a name on every Muslim's tongue for the rest of time. Aflah's road was shorter and quieter. The persecution against him had been so severe, his body so broken, that Abu Bakr sent him away to Abyssinia to escape it, to

the land across the sea where the just Christian king gave refuge to the believers. And there, according to the few accounts we have, Aflah died soon after.

That is nearly all of it. A man tortured to the brink of death, freed, sent to safety, and gone, with no famous chapter of glory to follow in this world. But ask yourself what his standing must be with Allah. A man who bore the very same agony as Bilal, who could have ended it at any moment with a single word of disbelief and chose instead to be dragged through the streets, who then crossed the sea and died a stranger far from home, still holding the faith he had been tortured for. The world gave him almost nothing. We do not even have his full story. But the One whose opinion decides everything saw all of it.

There is a small, true thing worth telling here. Dr. Omar Suleiman recounts that he met a man who had named his child Aflah, and asked him whether he knew who Aflah was. The man did not. And when he was told that this was the companion who was tortured exactly like Bilal, it brought him to tears. We use these names. We should use these names. We should pause over a man like this, who carried a level of certainty most of us have never been tested for, and who endured what he endured so that the name could reach us at all.

Around them, a crowd of the forgotten

Zinneera and Aflah were not the only ones. The same years, the same city, held others whose stories survive only in a sentence. There was a believing woman, Lubaynah, who took the wrath of the powerful for the sake of Allah. There was an-Nahdiyyah and her daughter. There was the enslaved girl whom Umar ibn al-Khattab, before his Islam, used to beat until he tired of beating her, telling her plainly that he had only stopped because he was

exhausted, not because he pitied her. Abu Bakr bought her freedom too. There is something almost unbearable in that detail, when you remember who Umar would become, and how close he and Abu Bakr would grow. The woman he had beaten in his ignorance was set free by the man who would become his dearest companion, and she had been right all along.

These names blur together because the records are thin, but the thinness is itself part of the lesson. For every Bilal whose story filled out and reached us whole, there were many whose stories did not, who suffered exactly as much and are known to Allah alone. The religion you practice was carried, in part, on the backs of people whose names you will never learn until the Day you meet them.

What looked like loss

If you had stood in the streets of Makkah and watched Zinneera beaten blind, or watched Aflah dragged by a rope until he could barely breathe, you would not have called these successful lives. You would have seen powerless people destroyed by the powerful, with nothing to show for it. Zinneera had no rank to lose and lost her sight on top of it. Aflah was freed only to be shipped across the sea and die young in a foreign land. By every measure the world uses, these were lives thrown away.

And yet. Zinneera's eyes were opened again by her Lord in front of the very men who claimed His name belonged to their idols. Aflah carried into his grave a patience that places him, in the sight of Allah, among the foremost of this ummah, the tortured forerunners who came before everyone else and paid more than almost anyone. What looked like loss was the exact opposite. The body broken in this world was being recorded in the next as the

most valuable thing a person can own: a faith that would not bend under fire.

This is the quiet rule that runs underneath their whole story. Nothing given to Allah is ever lost. Nothing suffered for Him is ever wasted. The accounting that matters is not kept in the streets of Makkah or in the memory of men. It is kept with the One who does not forget a single name.

What the lives of Zinneera and Aflah ask of our faith

It is easy to read a chapter like this and feel a wave of sympathy, to wince at the cruelty and then turn the page. That would be a waste of what their lives are actually for. These two did not suffer so that we could feel sorry for them. Their lives are a question put directly to our own iman.

Start with Zinneera, blind and mocked, declaring that all power belongs to Allah and the idols have none. That is the heart of tawheed, and it is not only a creed for the lips. It is a way of seeing the world. How much of your fear and your hope is quietly pointed at things that have no real power over you: a boss, a market, an illness, the opinion of people whose approval you crave? Zinneera, with her eyes gone and her tormentor standing over her, could see more clearly than the men with working eyes around her. She knew that nothing harms and nothing benefits except by the will of Allah. Live as though that is true. When you are afraid, be afraid of disobeying Him. When you hope, hope in Him. Let your heart stop bowing to the small idols of this age that cannot give you anything and cannot take anything except what Allah has already decreed.

Then look at how she was rewarded, and how Aflah was not, at least not in any way the world could see. Her sight came back;

his life simply ended in exile. The lesson is not that faith always brings a visible miracle. It is that the reward is real whether or not you ever see it. Most of us, if we are honest, serve Allah with one eye on the result. We obey, and then we wait to see the payoff, and our certainty wobbles when it does not come. Aflah's whole life answers that. He got no payoff in this world. He got the only thing worth getting, and he got it from Allah. Sincerity, *ikhlas*, is exactly this: to do the deed for Allah alone, and to be content that He has seen it, even if no human being ever does and even if this world never pays you back.

And learn from Abu Bakr standing at the center of both stories, told by his own father that he was wasting his wealth on people who could do nothing for him, answering that he sought nothing from them, only what was with Allah. There is a concrete thing here you can take into an ordinary week. Do some good that no one will ever credit you for. Spend on someone who cannot repay you and cannot raise your standing. Help the person whose gratitude will never reach the people you want to impress. Free someone, in whatever small way is in your power, from a burden, and tell no one. That is the spirit that ran through the man who bought Zinneera and Aflah their freedom, and it is still open to anyone who wants it.

Their endurance asks one more thing of us, the hardest. They held to Allah through a suffering most of us will never face, and they did not curse His decree. We complain at delays, at discomforts, at hardships that are nothing beside a stone on the chest or a rope around the neck. Their patience does not shame us so much as it calls us upward. When your own hardship comes, and it will, let their certainty be the thing you reach for: that all power is His, that nothing you endure for Him is lost, that

the One who returned Zinneera's sight and received Aflah's soul is the same Lord who is watching over you now.

So take one thing from these two into your life today. Point your fear and your hope back at Allah alone. Do one good deed in secret, for Him, that the world will never reward. And the next time hardship presses on your chest, hold your trust in Allah the way they held theirs, without a word of complaint against His decree. That is how the tortured ones lived, and what they bought with their suffering is the very faith now resting in your hands.

May Allah be pleased with Zinneera, and with Aflah, and with every one of the persecuted believers whose names we know and whose names only He knows, who endured the worst of times so that we could inherit this beautiful religion. And may He raise us, in our ease, upon a measure of the certainty He gave them in their pain.

This chapter follows the account of Zinneera (RA) and Aflah (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The episode preserves these reports without quoting a specific Qur'anic verse, and so none is quoted here. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Amir ibn Fuhayra

The Guide on the Hijrah

There are moments in history so consequential that nearly everyone who lived to see them did so from a distance, through rumor, through the reports of others, years after the dust had settled. And then there are the few who stood inside those moments, close enough to touch them. When the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ left Makkah in the dead of night and began the journey that would split history in two, only three human beings travelled with him on the open desert: himself, his closest friend, and a freed slave leading the way. That freed slave was a shepherd, a man born into bondage, a man with no name worth recording in the registers of Quraysh. His name was Amir ibn Fuhayra, and he had one of the finest seats in all of history.

Born into chains

Amir ibn Fuhayra (may Allah be pleased with him) was of Abyssinian descent, and his whole early life was the life of a slave. He owned nothing, not even himself. He belonged to a man named Tufayl ibn Abdullah al-Azdi, and the chain of relationships around Tufayl tells you something about where this story is heading. Tufayl was the stepson of Abu Bakr as-Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him). Abu Bakr had married a woman named Umm Ruman, who was the mother of Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), and Umm Ruman had been a widow before that marriage. Tufayl was her son from her first husband. So

Tufayl was Abu Bakr's stepson, and the half-brother of Aisha through their shared mother. Amir, the enslaved man in that household, lived at the edge of one of the most important families Islam would ever know, long before any of them understood what was coming.

Amir believed early. He embraced Islam before the Prophet ﷺ ever gathered the believers in the house of al-Arqam, which means he was among the very first of the first, the earliest handful of human beings to accept the message. And like the others in that handful who had no clan to shield them, no wealth to buy them safety, he paid for his faith in his own flesh.

What was done to him is hard to read. It is written of him, plainly, that there was scarcely a method of torture his persecutors could imagine that they did not try out on him. They burned him. They took hot coals and let them sear down his back, the same cruelty famously inflicted on another of the tortured believers. They deprived him of sleep until his mind reeled. They withheld water from him in the heat and gave him no food for days at a time. They dragged him through the streets. They chained him and let people beat him at will. The records do not even bother to name a single tormentor, because the answer was: everyone. A man of his status, a slave with no protector, was fair game for any of the Makkan elite who wanted to make an example of him. He had no defense except his patience, and he held to it.

Then Abu Bakr saw him. Abu Bakr as-Siddiq had a habit, from before the message even came, of buying enslaved people their freedom. When Islam arrived, that habit found its purpose: he spent his own wealth purchasing the freedom of the believers who were being broken for their faith. He came to Amir, paid the

price of his freedom, and set him loose. A man who had been owned by others now belonged to himself.

The shepherd who chose loyalty

Amir was free. He could have gone anywhere. But in that society, the bond between a freed man and the one who freed him did not simply dissolve. And in any case, who would want to walk away from Abu Bakr? Beyond the gratitude any decent person would feel, Amir knew exactly who Abu Bakr was: a man of extraordinary character, the closest friend of the Prophet ﷺ, the one who had preceded everyone into belief. Amir wanted to stay near him. So he became Abu Bakr's shepherd, tending his flocks, and through that humble work he gained something far more valuable than wages. He gained nearness to the household of as-Siddiq, and through it, nearness to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ himself. There is a quiet lesson sitting inside this: the same freedom that released him from cruelty, he spent on closeness to good people. Sustenance from Allah does not always arrive as gold. Sometimes it arrives as the right people to stand beside.

For a while, that is all he was. A freed shepherd, faithful, scarred, unremarkable to anyone watching from the outside. And then came the night that would place him, of all people, at the center of the most important journey in the life of the Prophet ﷺ.

Three nights in the cave

When the order came for the Prophet ﷺ to leave Makkah, the plot against his life was already closing in. He and Abu Bakr slipped out of the city and made their way to a cave, where they hid for three days and three nights while Quraysh combed the desert for them. The Qur'an itself preserves the tenderness of that hiding place, the moment when Abu Bakr, seeing the

searchers come close enough that they might have looked down and found the two of them, was overcome with fear, not for himself, but for the Prophet ﷺ. And the Prophet ﷺ comforted him with words that have echoed down every century since, telling him not to grieve, for they were two and Allah was with them:

Even if you do not help the Prophet, God helped him when the disbelievers drove him out: when the two of them were in the cave, he [Muhammad] said to his companion, 'Do not worry, God is with us,' and God sent His calm down to him, aided him with forces invisible to you, and brought down the disbelievers' plan. God's plan is higher: God is almighty and wise.

QUR'AN 9:40

Inside the cave it was only the two of them. But the operation that kept them alive was a family effort, and Amir was woven through every part of it. We know the role of Asma bint Abi Bakr (may Allah be pleased with her), who carried food and drink up to the cave. We know the role of Abdullah ibn Abi Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), who spent his days in Makkah listening, gathering the news, and bringing word of what Quraysh was planning. And then there was Amir. He was never far from the Prophet ﷺ through any of it.

Amir was the shepherd, and so his task used the only thing he knew. Each day, at a chosen hour when no one would notice, he drove his sheep out to the cave. He did this for two reasons, and both were brilliant. First, the milk and the meat of those sheep fed the Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr in their hiding. Second, and this is the touch of a man who understood the danger completely, he used the flock to erase their tracks. The footprints of Asma and

Abdullah, the trails leading to and from the cave, were trampled out under the hooves of his sheep so that no tracker could read the ground. Day after day he came, fed them, covered the signs of their presence, and slipped away. The survival of the Prophet ﷺ in those three nights leaned, in part, on the quiet competence of a freed slave doing the only job he had ever been allowed to do, and doing it for the sake of Allah.

When the three days had passed and the search had cooled, it was Amir who came with the means to move on. He brought two camels for the Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr to ride, and he himself rode out with them. Picture it: of all the people in the world, of all the believers who loved the Prophet ﷺ, the one chosen to make that desert crossing at his side was this man. He was their guide. He travelled with them across the open land toward Madinah, and he would enter the city with them at the journey's end. There is no higher honor in the early biography of any companion than to have been one of the small party of the Hijrah, and Amir was in it, not as a passenger but as the guide who knew the way.

The note for Suraqah

On that journey came one of its most famous episodes, and again, Amir was the one holding the pen.

There was a bounty on the Prophet's head. A man named Suraqah ibn Malik set out to claim it, riding hard after the small party, sword ready, dreaming of the reward Quraysh had promised. But as he closed in, something stopped him. His horse stumbled and sank into the ground beneath him, throwing him. He tried again, and again he was halted by forces he could not see or fight. The earth itself seemed to be defending the Prophet ﷺ. And in that strange, humbling moment, Suraqah's heart turned. He stopped trying to kill the Prophet ﷺ for the reward of

this world, and instead came forward asking for a different kind of reward, the one that lasts. He wanted a guarantee of safety, a written note of amnesty, a promise of protection.

The Prophet ﷺ granted it. And the hand that wrote that note, at the Prophet's instruction, was Amir's. Sit with that for a moment. A freed Abyssinian shepherd, a man whose people had owned him, was literate. He could read and he could write, in a society where that was a rare skill. And so it was Amir who put to paper the document of amnesty for Suraqah, the man who had come to kill and stayed to be saved. In that same encounter the Prophet ﷺ looked at this would-be assassin and foretold a day when Suraqah would wear the two gold bracelets of Khosrow, the emperor of Persia, a prophecy of a victory so vast it must have seemed impossible from the floor of that desert. And the written record of that meeting was set down by the guide. Amir kept finding himself at the hinge of history, pen in hand, sheep at his back, asking nothing for himself.

Badr, Uhud, and the man who stood firm

Once they reached Madinah, Amir's life of contribution only deepened. He earned a rank that the companions treasured above almost any other: he became one of the veterans of Badr. He fought in that first great battle alongside Abu Bakr, among the small band of believers whom Allah honored on that day. To have been "of the people of Badr" was, for the rest of one's life, a mark of distinction that the Prophet ﷺ himself spoke of with reverence.

Then came Uhud, the day the believers were tested to their limits, the day when the line broke and many fled the field. Amir was among those who held. He did not run. He stood firm on the battlefield of Uhud, one of the steadfast, among those with whom

Allah was pleased. Look at the shape of this man's life as it accumulates: tortured for his faith in Makkah, freed by as-Siddiq, trusted as the guide of the Hijrah, present and writing at the conversion of Suraqah, a veteran of Badr, and one of the unwavering at Uhud. A life that began in chains had become a life threaded through every defining trial of the early ummah, and he met every one of them on his feet.

"By the Lord of the Kaaba, I have succeeded"

About three or four months after Uhud, a delegation came to the Prophet ﷺ from the people of Najd, asking him to send teachers, scholars among the companions, the reciters and the readers who carried the Qur'an, so that they could teach the religion to their tribes. Amir was exactly such a man. Literate, learned in the Qur'an, counted among the best of the companions in this regard, he was chosen to go. It looked like the opening of a new frontier for Islam, another land receiving the message.

It was a trap. When the group of teachers arrived, they were betrayed and slaughtered. To feel the weight of this, remember what had just happened at Uhud. The Prophet ﷺ had already lost some of his finest there: Hamza, Mus'ab ibn Umayr, and others whose names the believers mourned. Every household in Madinah had been struck by that grief. And now, only months later, in a place where everyone expected good news, another group of the most righteous companions was murdered through deceit, in numbers nearly matching the losses of Uhud. The community absorbed a second blow on the heels of the first. Amir ibn Fuhayra was one of the slain. He was only forty years old.

But of all the men killed that day, something specific and unforgettable happened in his death. The man who killed him was

named Jabbar ibn Salma. Jabbar drove his sword through Amir's body with such force that the point came out the other side; he watched it emerge from Amir's back. And in that final instant, with the weapon run clean through him, Amir did not cry out in pain or curse his killer. He looked up toward the heavens and he said: "Fuztu wa Rabbil-Ka'bah." By the Lord of the Kaaba, I have succeeded. By Allah, I have succeeded.

His killer stood over him, stunned. These were words that made no sense to a man who did not understand this religion. Here was someone with a sword through his body, dying, and his face was lifted and lit with the language of victory. Some narrations, though without a firmly authenticated chain, add that Amir's body was then lifted up, that the angels themselves took him, and that his body was never recovered for the rites that the living owe the dead. Jabbar saw something he could not explain, a death that did not behave like death.

And so Amir's final act on this earth was not his martyrdom alone. It was the seed he planted in the heart of the man who killed him. Jabbar carried his confusion back to the Muslims and asked them: what did he mean, when he said "I have succeeded by Allah"? Because I saw things in his eyes, and in what happened when I killed him, that were not of this world. What did that man know? That question would not leave him. And it was that incident, the certainty he had witnessed in the face of the man he had just run through with a sword, that led Jabbar ibn Salma to Islam. The murderer became a believer because of the conviction of the murdered.

The scholars place this story beside the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ about Allah laughing at two men, one who killed the other in disbelief, and then the slayer accepting faith, so that both end up

in Paradise together. They place it, too, beside the story of the man who threw the spear that killed Hamza and later embraced Islam himself. Here was a living echo of that mercy: a man whose dying breath was an act of da'wah more powerful than a thousand sermons. After everything, after the torture, the Hijrah, Badr, and Uhud, his last gift to the religion was to die in such a way that his killer could not help but follow him into the faith. Who could carry such certainty to his final breath? Perhaps only a man who had spent his days close to the Prophet ﷺ and to as-Siddiq, the truthful one, until truthfulness had soaked all the way through him.

What Amir's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read the life of Amir ibn Fuhayra and feel a distant kind of awe, to file him away as a hero of an age we could never reach. That would be a mistake, and a quiet theft from our own hearts. His life is not a museum piece. It is a set of questions pressed directly against our own faith.

Begin with where he started. He was a slave, tortured with every cruelty his enemies could devise, owning nothing, defended by no one. By every measure the world recognizes, he was at the very bottom. And from that bottom, Allah raised him to be the guide of the Hijrah, the scribe at Suraqah's conversion, a veteran of Badr, and a martyr whose death brought a man to faith. The lesson is not that he was special and we are not. It is that Allah does not look at where you begin, or at what the world thinks you are worth. He looks at what you give Him from where you are. Amir teaches you that no one is too low, too overlooked, too unremarkable to be of immense use to Allah. Whatever your station feels like today, it is enough raw material for a life that matters to your Lord.

Look next at how he served. His great contribution in the cave was, on the surface, the most ordinary thing imaginable: he herded sheep. That was the only skill bondage had ever permitted him. And he took that single, humble ability and bent it entirely toward the Prophet ﷺ, feeding him, hiding his tracks, asking for nothing. This is the heart of ikhlas, sincerity for the sake of Allah. You do not need a grand or glamorous gift to serve Him. You need to take whatever you actually have, your job, your skill, your spare hour, your literacy, your strength, and turn it toward what He loves. Amir did not wait to become someone important before he became useful. He used what was in his hands. Ask yourself what is already in yours, and whether you have turned it toward Allah or only toward yourself.

Then there is his patience. Read again the catalogue of what was done to his body, and notice what is missing from his story: a single word of complaint, a single moment of bargaining with Allah for relief. He bore the coals and the chains and the thirst, and he kept his faith, and then he kept serving. Contentment with Allah's decree is not the absence of pain. It is the refusal to let pain turn you bitter toward your Lord. When hardship comes to you, and it will, his life asks whether your trust in Allah is sturdy enough to stay intact while you are being tested, not only after the test is over.

And finally, hold onto the way he died, because it is the part most likely to change how you live. "I have succeeded by Allah," he said, with a spear through his body. He could say it because, to him, success was never about surviving, or comfort, or being recognized, or living long. Success was meeting Allah having given Him everything. The world, watching, would have called his life a tragedy: a slave, tortured, who finally found freedom only to be betrayed and murdered at forty, his body never even

recovered. But he knew better. He knew he had won. This is the love and hope and fear of Allah resolving into one clear certainty: that the only outcome that counts is the one waiting on the other side. If you can begin to believe that, even a little, it reorders everything, what you chase, what you fear, what you are willing to lose.

So take something from him into your own ordinary day. Use the one skill you have, today, for Allah, without telling anyone. Bear one hardship without turning a complaint toward your Lord. And loosen your grip, just slightly, on the idea that success means safety, comfort, and applause, and let it mean instead what it meant to a freed shepherd dying in the dirt with his eyes on the sky. May Allah be pleased with Amir ibn Fuhayra, raise us upon a measure of his sincerity and his certainty, and let our own last words, whenever they come, be the words of a soul that knows it has succeeded by Allah.

This chapter follows the account of Amir ibn Fuhayra (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (9:40). Where the histories carry more than one narration, including the report that his body was raised and not recovered, the most widely reported account has been followed and noted as such.

Anisa, Al-Numan, and Amir

The Passengers of the Boats

There is a kind of believer who is never on anyone's list. They are not at the famous battles. Their names are not carved into the great moments that the whole ummah remembers. They believed early, gave up everything, and then disappeared from the story for years, living far from the Prophet ﷺ and far from the city where the religion was being built. And then, near the very end, they come quietly back into view, on a boat, crossing the sea to be with him at last.

This chapter is about a group of them. Some we can name. Most we cannot. They were the Muslims who had fled to Abyssinia in the earliest days, and who came home only in the seventh year after the Hijrah, after they had missed almost everything. Their story sits at the edge of the seerah, and it is one of the most quietly moving parts of it.

A king who longed to see the Prophet

To understand the boats, you first have to understand the man who provided them. An-Najashi (may Allah be pleased with him), the Negus of Abyssinia, was the Christian king who had given the persecuted Muslims refuge when Makkah had become unbearable. He had wept when he heard the Qur'an recited in his court. He had protected the believers when Quraysh sent envoys demanding their return. And though he ruled a kingdom across

the sea, he carried in his heart a deep longing to see the Prophet ﷺ, a man he would never meet in this life.

His protection had not come easily. At one point in his reign there was a revolt, an attempt to overthrow him, and the Muslims sheltering in his land watched it with fear, because if he fell, their refuge fell with him. An-Najashi did not leave them defenceless. He gave Ja'far ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) and his companions a ship and told them plainly: I am going to try to crush this rebellion, but if things do not work out, here is your way out. The ship is yours, already furnished, with everything you need on it, and here is a secret path to safety. Follow the news. If I am overthrown, take it and go.

This was before Madinah even existed as the believers' home. They were watching, waiting, holding their breath. And Allah gave An-Najashi victory over those who had risen against him. The Muslims rejoiced that day as they would rejoice at almost nothing else. It was said that the only thing that would surpass that joy was the victory of Badr itself.

Two boats, and the last crossing

Years passed. Madinah was established. The believers there fought at Badr, at Uhud, at the trench of Khandaq when the armies of the whole peninsula gathered to wipe them out and Allah turned them back. They marched on Khaybar and conquered it. And through all of it, a community of the earliest Muslims was still living in Abyssinia, across the water, separated from the Prophet ﷺ by years and by an ocean.

In the seventh year after the Hijrah, right after Khaybar, An-Najashi provided two boats so that the remaining Muslims of Abyssinia could finally cross the sea and come home to Madinah.

Ja'far ibn Abi Talib was among them. So were many others who had left Makkah at the very beginning and had not seen the Prophet ﷺ since.

The arrival is preserved through Abu Musa al-Ash'ari (may Allah be pleased with him), himself one of the travellers. Abu Musa was from Yemen. When the news reached him that the Prophet ﷺ had migrated and settled, he and his two brothers, Abu Burda and Abu Ruhm, set out to join him, more than fifty men sailing from Yemen. Their ship was carried to Abyssinia, and there they found Ja'far and his companions still waiting. Ja'far told them what the Prophet ﷺ had commanded: that they remain there for now. "The Messenger of Allah ﷺ sent us here," he explained, "and commanded us to stay. So stay with us." And they did, until the time came, and then they all crossed together to Madinah.

When the believers from Abyssinia finally reached the Prophet ﷺ, he was overjoyed to see Ja'far. He embraced him, and he kissed him between his eyes, on the forehead. And he said a sentence that tells you exactly how he weighed a returning believer against a great military victory: "I do not know which of the two makes me happier, the coming of Ja'far, or the conquest of Khaybar."

Think about that. Khaybar was one of the most significant victories of his life. And the safe return of a group of long-lost believers stood beside it in his heart.

The first inheritance in Islam

So who were the people on those boats? Most of them are unnamed, and we will come back to that. But a few names survive, and each one carries a small, luminous detail.

There was a man named Adi ibn Nadla (may Allah be pleased with him). Adi was not only one of the first Muslims. He holds a distinction that sounds almost technical until you sit with it: he is considered the first person in Islam ever to be inherited from. He died in Abyssinia, a believer far from home, and he left behind two children, Anisa bint Adi and an-Nu'man ibn Adi (may Allah be pleased with them).

When Adi passed away, his estate passed to his son and daughter, and in that quiet moment the rules of inheritance that Allah had revealed were applied for the first time in the history of this religion. Anisa and her brother an-Nu'man were the first heirs in Islam. They then boarded the boats and came from Abyssinia to Madinah, among the passengers of that crossing.

There is something worth pausing on here. Anisa is a name many Muslims still carry today. A girl given that name can be told that it reaches back to one of the earliest believing families, to a woman who left her home for her faith, buried her father in a foreign land, and sailed across the sea to live in the shadow of the Prophet ﷺ. The smallest details of these lives are not really small. The first time a sister inherited from her father under the law of Allah, it was this sister, on her way to this city.

The keeper of the Prophet's hair

Another passenger was Ma'mar ibn Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with him). Like the others, he had longed to be close to the Prophet ﷺ, and the closeness Allah granted him was of a tender and unusual kind.

It was Ma'mar who shaved the head of the Prophet ﷺ during the Farewell Hajj. And when he had done so, the Prophet ﷺ allowed him to keep some of that blessed hair. Ma'mar treasured it. He

guarded it so carefully that he became known among the people as the keeper of the Prophet's hair.

There is a whole life folded into that one role. A man flees his home for his faith. He spends long years across the sea, missing battle after battle, gathering, perhaps, the quiet fear that he had given up the chance to ever truly be near the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. And then Allah brings him home, and not only home, but close enough to be the one trusted with the Prophet's own hair, a relic he would carry as a treasure for the rest of his days. Allah does not forget the one who left everything for Him. He often returns it multiplied, in ways the believer could never have asked for.

A brother who came home

The last of the named passengers is Amir ibn Abi Waqqas (may Allah be pleased with him), the brother of the famous companion Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas (may Allah be pleased with him).

Amir was among those who escaped the persecution of Makkah by fleeing to Abyssinia. His brother Sa'd had stayed behind, and it was not easy for Sa'd, nor was it easy for Amir. Two brothers, in two different trials, in two different places, each holding to the same faith. And now, on these boats, Amir finally came home to join his brother and to join the Prophet ﷺ in Madinah after the long separation. The family that the persecution had scattered was, by the mercy of Allah, brought back together.

These are the few names that history kept. There were many others on those boats whose names are written nowhere that we can read. They believed, they suffered, they crossed the sea, and they entered Madinah, and the books of men did not record who they were. But they are not forgotten where it matters.

Every one of them was promised

Step back and look at the whole sweep of these early lives, because Dr. Omar Suleiman draws out something here that is easy to miss. Among the first Muslims, there was every imaginable path.

There were those who made the migration to Abyssinia and then the migration to Madinah, completing both. There were those who went to Abyssinia, heard that things had improved in Makkah, returned, and then found themselves trapped there again. There were those who made the journey to Abyssinia and died in Abyssinia, never seeing Madinah at all. There were those who could not flee, and died in Makkah under persecution. There were those who set out for the promised city of Madinah and died on the road, so close, never reaching it. And there were those, the passengers of these boats, who lived in Abyssinia for many long years and finally came home to spend only the last two or three years of the Prophet's life beside him.

Different routes. Different lengths of trial. Different shares of nearness to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Some saw almost everything. Some saw almost nothing. And over all of them, Dr. Suleiman places a single verse. When Allah speaks of the believers who gave and strove, and ranks some above others according to when and how they served, He does not leave the rest behind. He says of every one of them:

Why should you not give for God's cause when God alone will inherit what is in the heavens and earth? Those who gave and fought before the triumph are not like others: they are greater in rank than those who gave and fought afterwards. But God has promised a good reward to all of them: God is fully aware of all that you do.

To each of them, a good reward. Each one was promised Jannah and his own particular share of it. The one who died on the road and the one who lived to see Khaybar were not equal in rank, and yet not one of them was abandoned. Allah saw every step of every journey, including the ones that ended early, including the ones no historian recorded.

What the passengers' lives ask of our faith

It is easy to read about Khadijah, or Abu Bakr, or Bilal, and feel that faith belongs to the great and the named. The passengers of these boats ask us something different, something closer to our own lives, because most of us will live and die unnamed.

They believed without being seen. For years they were far from the centre of everything. The verses came down in Makkah and Madinah, the battles were fought, the religion took its shape, and they were across the sea with none of it, holding on to a faith they had accepted long before, with no crowd around them and no great events to carry them. That is most of a believer's life. You will not be at the famous moments. You will hold to Allah in ordinary rooms, far from anyone who would notice. Their lives say that this hidden, unwitnessed faithfulness is not a lesser faith. It is the very thing Allah was watching the whole time.

They were content with the share Allah gave them. Some of them reached the Prophet ﷺ only at the end and had just a few years near him. They did not get the long companionship others were given. And yet there is no record of bitterness, only the joy of finally arriving. This is contentment with Allah's decree, ridaa: to accept the portion He has measured for you without resenting that someone else was given more time, more nearness, more

visible reward. In your own life, He has decided what you will be present for and what you will miss, who you will sit beside and who you will only hear about. Faith is trusting that the share He chose for you is the share that is best for you.

And here is the part that should settle the heart of anyone who fears their efforts are too small to count. Adi ibn Nadla died in a foreign land and is remembered, of all things, for being the first person inherited from, a detail so quiet it sounds like a footnote. Ma'mar is remembered for keeping a lock of hair. Anisa is remembered as a name. Many of their companions are remembered by no name at all. And every single one of them was promised a good reward by the Lord of the heavens and the earth. The world keeps lists of the important. Allah keeps a different record entirely, and on His record the unnamed passenger of a forgotten boat is written down in full, with everything he gave and everything he suffered, none of it lost.

So take this into your ordinary life. Do one thing for Allah that no one will see and no one will record, a prayer in the dark, a charity given in secret, a hardship borne quietly without complaint, and do it knowing that the absence of an audience changes nothing about the reward. Sincerity for Allah alone, ikhlas, is exactly what these passengers had, because for years they had no one else to perform for. Make your faith the kind that does not need to be seen to be real. Be content with the portion He has given you, near or far, early or late, much or little, trusting that He has promised the faithful a good reward, all of them, every one. May Allah be pleased with Anisa, an-Nu'man, Amir, and every unnamed passenger of those boats, and may He write us among those He has promised, even if the world never writes down our names at all.

This chapter follows the account of the Muslims of Abyssinia and the passengers of An-Najashi's boats in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (57:10); the same "good reward for all of them" promise also appears at 4:95. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Rayta bint al-Harith

The One Who Died Between Two Migrations

There is a kind of believer whose name the early Muslims barely wrote down. Not because they were small in the sight of Allah, but because their entire lives were spent in motion, leaving one place for another, carrying almost nothing, asking for almost nothing, and dying somewhere on a road before they ever arrived. Rayta bint al-Harith (may Allah be pleased with her) was one of these. Her story is short. It is also one of the heaviest stories in the whole record of the first generation, because of where it ends, and because of what Allah said about people who end exactly the way she did.

She is easy to confuse with others, and the histories themselves admit it. Her name was a common one in those years. She is not the only woman of the early community who carried it, and she is not the sister of certain other companions who shared it. What we can say with confidence is small and precious: she was the wife of al-Harith ibn Khalid, that the two of them believed in the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ very early, and that they were counted among the first forty or fifty souls to enter Islam. Beyond that, the curtain over their lives in Makkah is almost completely drawn. We do not know the texture of their days there, what they owned, who their people were. We only know the shape of them, and the shape tells us a great deal.

Among the first, and among the vulnerable

To be one of the first forty or fifty was to belong to the most exposed group of human beings in Makkah. These were not, for the most part, the great names of Quraysh. They were not the chiefs of powerful tribes or the men whose word moved the city. Many of them were young couples with no protection behind them, the disenfranchised, those who had married into society from its edges, some of them former slaves who had married one another and were building a life with their bare hands. They had answered a call that the powerful of Makkah found offensive, and they had no clan large enough to shield them from the consequences.

Rayta and her husband were two of these vulnerable ones. And it is worth pausing on that, because we sometimes imagine that the people closest to the beginning of Islam were carried into it by strength, by status, by having something to gain. The opposite is nearer the truth. They came in with nothing, and the religion cost them what little they had. They believed because it was true, not because it was safe, and there was no worldly advantage waiting on the other side of their faith. There was only Allah, and the word of His Messenger ﷺ, and a future they could not see.

Four children born in exile

When the persecution in Makkah grew unbearable, the Prophet ﷺ directed a group of the believers to cross the sea to Abyssinia, to the land of a just Christian king who would not wrong them. They travelled under the leadership of Ja'far ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him). Rayta and al-Harith were among them. They left their city as a young couple with no children, sailing away from everything familiar toward a foreign shore, carrying only their faith and each other.

In Abyssinia, Allah opened the doors of mercy to them in a quiet, ordinary, beautiful way. They had children there. Not one, not two, but four, and their names have come down to us: Musa, Zainab, Aisha, and Fatima. Picture what that means. Every one of these children was born in exile, in a land that was not their own, to parents who had fled there for the sake of Allah. The home this family knew was a borrowed home. The ground their children first walked on was the ground of refuge. And still, in the middle of all that uncertainty, life grew. A household took shape on foreign soil, built entirely on trust in Allah's promise that the believers would not be abandoned.

They were waiting. That is the thread that runs through this whole period of their lives. They were waiting for word from the Prophet ﷺ, for news of whether they should return to Makkah or go somewhere else, for some sign that the long season of exile was ending. They lived in that posture of patient expectation that so many believers live in, the posture of a heart that has placed its affairs in the hands of Allah and is willing to wait for Him to open the way.

The news from Madinah, and the road home

Then the news came that changed everything. The Prophet ﷺ and the believers had made the hijra to Madinah. A city had opened its arms to Islam. There was now a place on the earth where the Muslims could live together, openly, under the leadership of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, free at last from the daily cruelty of Makkah. For people who had spent years across the sea, dreaming of being gathered again with the believers, this was the news they had been praying for.

Rayta and al-Harith did not wait. They were among those who left Abyssinia immediately, the moment they heard, to join the

community in Madinah. You can feel the eagerness in that decision. They had been holding their breath for years, and now there was air. The promise of Madinah was real: to finally pray among the Muslims, to sit in the gathering of the Prophet ﷺ, to belong to something instead of merely surviving on its edges. So they gathered their four children and set out on the long, hard journey home, except that home was no longer Makkah; home was wherever the Prophet ﷺ was.

We have to understand what a journey like that demanded. To migrate across the world in those days, with very little provision, was to take serious risks at every stage. Where would you stop? How would you pace yourself across the empty distances? What would you eat and drink along the way, and where would you find it? You prepared as best you could, and then you placed the rest with Allah, because there was no safety net. A traveller in that wilderness could not call for help. Things could turn grave with no warning.

The morning he woke alone

They were getting close to Madinah. The hardest part of the road was nearly behind them. As migrants do, they were making their stops, resting, pacing themselves toward the city they could almost feel ahead of them. Somewhere on that final stretch, they came upon water and drank from it. Then, tired from the road, they lay down to sleep.

Al-Harith woke. And in the place where his family had lain down beside him, he found his wife Rayta dead, and three of his children, Musa, Zainab, and Aisha, dead with her. They had all drunk from water that was tainted, spoiled by something in it that took their lives while they slept. There is no sign that anyone meant them harm. It was not an attack. It was bad water on a

hard road, the kind of small, ordinary danger that ends lives without any drama at all. Of his wife and four children, only one daughter, Fatima, survived.

Sit with that scene for a moment, because it resists being rushed past. A man closes his eyes within reach of the city he has crossed the world to reach, his wife beside him, his four children around him, his whole heart present and accounted for. He opens his eyes, and most of them are gone. He had left Abyssinia with a wife and four children. He would enter Madinah with a single daughter, and the bodies of those he loved buried somewhere on the way. The joy that had carried him out of exile, the excitement of finally reaching the Prophet ﷺ and the new community, all of it turned in one morning into the harshest grief a person can be asked to carry.

And yet, look at where they died, and why, and for Whose sake. Rayta and her children did not die on an idle journey. They died as muhajirat, as migrants for the sake of Allah, leaving one land of faith and travelling toward another. They had not abandoned the deen at the first hardship; they had given their lives to it twice over, once when they crossed the sea to Abyssinia, and again when they set out for Madinah. They died, as the early Muslims understood it, from hijra to hijra, on the road between two migrations undertaken for Allah alone. Their status with Him is something the words of this world strain to hold.

What Allah guaranteed for them

Rayta's death was not the only one of its kind. In those years, others fell on the same roads. There were believers who intended the hijra and could not complete it, some overtaken by death along the way, some, it is feared, persecuted and killed for trying. There was a man who set out toward the hijra and was bitten by a

snake on the road and died. A family destroyed by bad water. A traveller killed by a serpent. People whose hearts were already in Madinah, whose feet never quite arrived. And a question hung over the living believers who had reached the city safely: what about these? What of those who left their homes for the sake of Allah and died before they could stand in the new community? Was their effort lost? Had they fallen short?

Allah answered them. He revealed words that lifted the whole matter out of human doubt and placed it in His own hands:

Anyone who migrates for God's cause will find many a refuge and great plenty in the earth, and if anyone leaves home as a migrant towards God and His Messenger and is then overtaken by death, his reward from God is sure. God is most forgiving and most merciful.

QUR'AN 4:100

Read that slowly, with Rayta in mind. Anyone who leaves home as a migrant toward Allah and His Messenger ﷺ, and is then overtaken by death, his reward from Allah is sure. Not possible. Not hoped for. Sure. Allah took it upon Himself to guarantee the reward. The believer who dies on the way, before reaching the destination, has already arrived where it counts. Their intention, carried out as far as their strength allowed, had already earned them everything that waited at the end of the road. Death on the journey did not cancel the journey; it completed it.

So everything Rayta would have found in Madinah, the prayers in the Prophet's company, the life among the believers, the long-awaited belonging, all of it had, in a sense, already become hers. She set out for it sincerely, she gave her life in pursuit of it, and Allah recorded the reward as though she had reached it. What looked, to a grieving husband on a lonely road, like a life cut

tragically short of its destination was in truth a life that had landed exactly where Allah wanted it, and been rewarded in full.

What Rayta's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to close a story like this with nothing but sorrow, or with admiration for a woman who endured so much. But Rayta's life is not asking for our pity, and she does not need our praise. Her life is asking a quieter and more searching question of our own iman. How much of what we do is truly for Allah, and would we still want it if we never lived to see the result?

Rayta moved through her whole life toward Allah without ever being given the ending she was working toward. She left Makkah for Abyssinia, and the reward was not in Abyssinia. She left Abyssinia for Madinah, and she never reached Madinah. Her entire adult life was migration for the sake of Allah, and she died before arriving at any of the destinations she had set out for. This is the heart of what she teaches: that the reward of a deed is tied to the intention and the striving, not to whether we personally live to enjoy the outcome. Allah saw her leave home for His sake, and that was enough. He guaranteed her reward Himself. Most of us quietly attach our sincerity to results. We want to see the fruit, to be there at the harvest, to know our effort mattered. Rayta gives her effort to Allah and lets Him keep the result, even when the result is a grave on the side of a road and a reward she will only meet on the Day she stands before Him.

That kind of trust, tawakkul, is not a feeling you summon in a crisis. It is built in ordinary days, in the small acts of obedience whose outcome you will never witness. The parent who raises a child upon faith and may not live to see who that child becomes. The person who gives in secret to a cause whose success is far off. The believer who prays for something for years with no

visible answer and keeps praying anyway, because the asking itself is for Allah. Rayta's life tells you that none of this is wasted. Allah does not measure your deed by whether you saw it bear fruit. He measures it by whether you set out, sincerely, toward Him.

And there is a mercy here that should reach anyone who has ever felt their efforts fall short through no fault of their own. Rayta did not fail. The water on that road was not a punishment, and her unfinished journey was not a deficiency in her faith. Sometimes a believer is stopped short by circumstances entirely outside their hands, and Allah, who is most forgiving and most merciful, counts them by their intention and not by the accident that ended them. If you have ever been unable to complete a good thing you sincerely began, illness cutting off your worship, hardship interrupting your plans, death taking someone before they reached what they hoped for, this verse is speaking to you. The reward from Allah is sure. He sees the heart that was on its way to Him.

So take one concrete thing from Rayta into your own life this week. Begin a good deed for the sake of Allah that you may never see completed, and make peace, in advance, with not seeing its end. Give in a way no one will trace back to you. Set your intention firmly toward Allah before some act of obedience, and then leave the outcome entirely to Him, the way she left Abyssinia not knowing she would never see Madinah. Train your heart to find its rest not in arriving, but in having sincerely set out. That is a way of living still open to every one of us, and it is exactly how the migrants between two migrations lived and died.

She was a woman almost no one remembered to write about, and her name is uncertain even now. But on the Day when Allah

gathers the first believers, when the great names of Makkah who counted themselves so high are weighed against the unnamed couple who left everything for Him, Rayta will be raised to a station this world could never have guessed. May Allah be pleased with Rayta bint al-Harith and her children, count them among the martyrs and the muhajirat whose reward He guaranteed Himself, and grant us the sincerity to set out toward Him with our whole hearts, content to leave the arrival in His hands.

This chapter follows the account of Rayta bint al-Harith (RA) and her family in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (4:100). Where the histories preserve only a partial record, including the uncertainty around her name, that uncertainty has been kept rather than smoothed over.

Khalid ibn Sa'id ibn al-As

The Man Pulled From the Fire

Before he had ever heard that there was a new religion in Makkah, before a single word of the message had reached his ears, Khalid ibn Sa'id ibn al-As (may Allah be pleased with him) saw a dream. In it, he stood at the lip of a valley filled with fire, and a hand he trusted was trying to push him in. Another hand, the hand of a man he knew only as Muhammad ibn Abdullah, reached out and pulled him back from the edge. He woke from that dream and walked out of his house into the morning, not yet knowing that the rescue he had seen in his sleep was about to happen to him in waking life, and that it would cost him almost everything the world had given him.

He was among the very first to believe. Some accounts place his Islam within hours of Abu Bakr's own, which is to say at the absolute dawn of this religion, when the believers could still be counted on one hand.

A son of Umayyah

It is worth pausing on who Khalid was before that morning, because his story is not the story of the weak and the enslaved of Makkah who flocked early to Islam because they had nothing to lose. Khalid had a great deal to lose. He was not one of the oppressed of the city. He was from Banu Umayyah, one of the

most powerful clans in Makkah, the son of Sa'id ibn al-As, a man of standing and influence.

Khalid himself does not seem to have chased political office. But he did not need to. To be a son of that house was already to be someone. And he carried a distinction that tells you something about how Makkah saw him. They called him Dhu al-Taj, the possessor of the crown. The name came from his turban. When Khalid wrapped his imamah in a particular style or color, no other man in the city would dare wear it that way while he wore it. Only when Khalid changed his turban would others begin to take up the old one. He was distinguished even in the cloth on his head, set apart by the unspoken agreement of a proud city.

This is the man Allah chose to wake with a dream of fire. Not a man with nothing, but a man with everything Makkah valued, who would be asked, very soon, to put all of it down.

The dream

The dream itself is one of the most vivid in the early seerah, and Khalid told it plainly. He found himself standing before a valley full of fire, a fire so severe and so hot that it seemed to be consuming itself. The sight of it terrified him. Then, as he looked into that fire, he saw his own father, Sa'id ibn al-As, coming up behind him. His father took hold of him and tried to push him into the flames. Khalid resisted, and his father began to wrestle with him, straining to throw his own son into the fire.

As he fought off his father's hands, a third figure entered the dream. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ came to him, took hold of him by his waist belt, and pulled him back, away from the edge, out of danger. And then Khalid woke.

There is a haunting symmetry here, because the Prophet ﷺ once described his own relationship to his people in almost exactly these terms. He said he was like a man standing before a fire while moths and insects threw themselves toward the flame, and he was seizing them by their waistbands to hold them back, even as some slipped from his grasp. Khalid had been shown, in his sleep, a private enactment of that very parable. He was one of the ones the Prophet ﷺ caught and held. His father was one of the ones pulling him the other way.

The interpreter in the street

When Khalid left his home that morning, unsettled by what he had seen, the first person he ran into was Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him). This was no small coincidence. Abu Bakr was known in Makkah, among other things, for two kinds of knowledge: he was a master of lineage and ancestry, and he was trusted in the interpretation of dreams. If you had seen a strange dream in that city and wanted it read, Abu Bakr was the man you sought.

So Khalid told him. I saw a strange dream last night, he said, let me run it by you. And he laid it out: the valley of fire, his father pushing him toward it, and Muhammad ibn Abdullah ﷺ pulling him back by his belt to safety.

Abu Bakr smiled. Then he said words that must have struck Khalid like cool water: By Allah, Khalid, Allah wants good for you. This man, he told him, is the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He is calling to the worship of one God, and he is the means by which Allah is protecting people from the punishment of the next life. The dream was not a riddle. It was an invitation.

Take me to him, Khalid said.

What are you calling to, Muhammad?

Abu Bakr brought him to the Prophet ﷺ, and they found him in a quiet place, in the area of Ajjad, absorbed in worship, raising his hands to Allah. There was no crowd, no spectacle, only a man at prayer to his Lord.

Khalid put his question simply. What are you calling to, Muhammad? Tell me about this religion. And the Prophet ﷺ told him. He said he was calling people to worship one God alone and to abandon the idols, these carved stones that could not benefit the one who worshipped them nor harm the one who walked away from them, stones that could do nothing at all. Worship the One who made you, and leave the rest.

In that moment, standing before a man at prayer in a hidden corner of Makkah, Khalid ibn Sa'id believed. By some accounts he became the fifth person to enter Islam, after Khadijah, after Abu Bakr, after Ali, near the head of a list so short that every name on it carries a weight that later thousands could never quite match. He saw the dream one night, had it interpreted by Abu Bakr at dawn, and entered the religion before the sun had traveled far. Few people in history have been guided so swiftly, or so gently, from a vision of fire to the safety of faith.

The crack of the staff

The dream had warned him, and now the warning came true. His father was exactly the man the dream had shown: not a bystander, but an enemy of the very thing that had saved his son. Sa'id ibn al-As was among those who worked in the apparatus of idol worship itself, in the building of the idols, the festivals, the pilgrimages and sacrifices offered to them. He held a high place in Banu Umayyah, and when news reached him that Muhammad

 was calling people to a new religion, he became at once a fierce opponent of it. Banu Hashim and Banu Umayyah: the old rivalry told you which way he would turn.

Then word reached him from his other children that this new call had reached his own household, that Khalid had answered it. He sent two of his other sons, Amr and Aban, to fetch their brother and bring him to face their father.

Khalid was brought in. Is it true what I have heard, his father demanded. It is true, Khalid answered. I have embraced the religion of the one God, and I have abandoned the idols you call us to worship. His father ordered him to leave this religion at once and return to the way of his fathers and forefathers. Khalid refused. I will not obey you, he said, in the disobedience of Allah.

At those words, Sa'id took a staff and struck his son across the head with it, cracking his skull so that the blood ran down. Then he ordered Khalid imprisoned, confined to a corner of the house, guarded, and starved. For three days no food reached him.

This was a man who had never known hardship. He had lived a privileged life, distinguished even in his turban, and persecution of this kind was something he had never tasted. Such a man, accustomed to ease, will often break the fastest when ease is taken away. After three days, his father sent a messenger to see whether the hunger and the confinement had bent him. The reply that came back was the same as before: By Allah, I will not follow him in the disobedience of Allah. The crown had been worth less to him than the truth. The hunger could not buy it back.

The brothers he was sent to lose

Here the story turns in a way that only Allah arranges. Sa'id had sent Amr and Aban to retrieve Khalid and, in the end, to talk him

out of his faith. What happened instead was the opposite of everything their father intended. Amr and Aban became Muslim. The brother they were sent to recover converted the brothers sent to recover him.

So three sons of Sa'id ibn al-As, Khalid first and then Amr and Aban, stood now among the early believers of Makkah, while their father stood among its enemies. The dream of the fire had not been about Khalid alone. The hand that reached for him reached, through him, for his brothers too.

When the believers could no longer bear the persecution and the migration to Abyssinia began, Khalid was among those who left. The cruelty visited on the privileged was often carried out behind closed doors, the staff and the locked chamber rather than the open street, but it was cruelty all the same, and his was severe. So he took his brothers and crossed the sea to Abyssinia, where he would remain until the Prophet ﷺ gave permission to come to Madinah.

A wedding in the palace

In Abyssinia, Khalid was given an honor that is easy to read past in the histories. When the Prophet ﷺ proposed marriage to Umm Habiba (may Allah be pleased with her), the daughter of Abu Sufyan, who was a widow among the migrants there, the marriage had to be conducted in his absence. The Prophet ﷺ chose the Negus, al-Najashi, to represent him and to conduct the contract. Umm Habiba was asked to choose a guardian, a wali, to give her in marriage. The natural choice was her closest male relative present, a man of her own clan known for his righteousness: Khalid ibn Sa'id.

So the Negus gathered them in his palace. He dismissed his guards, prepared a feast, and brought together Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, others of the believers, and Khalid ibn Sa'id. The Negus proposed on behalf of the Prophet ﷺ, and Khalid answered by praising Allah and sending blessings upon the Prophet ﷺ, and then gave Umm Habiba in marriage to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, asking that Allah bless him. The Negus reminded them that it was the way of the prophets that a marriage be followed by a feast, and the walima was served. Khalid, the son of Umayyah who had been struck and starved for his faith, now stood as the one who joined a daughter of Quraysh to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

Governor, commander, martyr

Khalid did not come to Madinah until after Khaybar. When the Prophet ﷺ saw him at last, he was so glad that he embraced him, and he placed Khalid in charge of Yemen, making him a governor. His brothers, too, were given authority: one over the region that would become Bahrain, and Amr over Khaybar. The three sons of Sa'id, who had once been gathered before their father to be broken, were now gathered as leaders in the service of the Prophet ﷺ.

When the Prophet ﷺ passed away, Khalid continued to serve, now as a commander under Abu Bakr, the same man who had read his dream in the street and walked him to Islam in its first hours. Abu Bakr appointed him among the commanders in the campaign toward the Byzantines in the north.

In the year 634, near the end, he married Umm Hakim, the widow of Ikrimah ibn Abi Jahl. She had entered Islam at the conquest of Makkah. They were married on the very eve of a battle known as Marj al-Saffar. On the day after that wedding night, Umm Hakim herself took up a sword and killed seven of the enemy with her

own hand. And on that same day, in that same battle, Khalid ibn Sa'id ibn al-As was killed. He died a martyr.

His life had run from a dream of fire to a death in the path of Allah. He saw the Prophet ﷺ in his sleep pulling him to safety, had the vision confirmed by Abu Bakr at dawn, lived a long and honored life beside the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and then in service to his closest friend, and in the end exchanged the temporary life for the lasting one, as the martyrs do. Through everything he gave, Allah gave him back something the world cannot offer.

What Khalid's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read Khalid's story as the tale of a fortunate man, guided by a beautiful dream, spared the long agony of doubt. But the dream was not the gift. The dream was only the invitation. The gift was what he did after he woke. And that is where his life reaches across the centuries and puts a question to us.

Khalid had everything that a person clings to. Lineage, comfort, status, a name so distinguished that men would not wear his turban while he wore it. And when his father demanded that he choose between all of that and his Lord, he did not hesitate. A staff cracked his skull. Three days of hunger were laid on a man who had never gone hungry in his life. And his answer never changed: I will not obey you in the disobedience of Allah. That single sentence is the whole of what faith asks of us. There will come a moment, perhaps many, when obedience to someone you love or fear or depend on collides with obedience to Allah, and in that moment everything is decided by which one you are unwilling to betray. Khalid teaches us to make the answer simple, and to make it before the staff is raised.

Notice, too, that he was the one the world expected to break, and he did not. The reasoning of his persecutors was sound by every worldly measure: a man raised in ease will fold the fastest when ease is removed. But faith does not run along worldly measures. A heart that has truly attached itself to Allah can carry hunger and pain that a softer life would seem to forbid. If you have ever told yourself that you are too comfortable, too sheltered, too ordinary to stand firm in a hard test, Khalid's three days in that locked corner answer you. The strength was never in his upbringing. It was in what he had chosen to love.

And look at what his steadfastness did to the people around him. He was supposed to be retrieved and corrected by his brothers, and instead his brothers were guided through him. He held his ground, and two more souls were pulled from the fire by his example. This is the quiet promise in his life for every ordinary believer: you do not always have to preach to call people to Allah. Sometimes you simply have to refuse to bend, and let those watching see what a person looks like who will not sell his faith. Your firmness in a small test may be the thing that saves someone you were never trying to convince.

So take Khalid into your week. When the next collision comes, and obedience to Allah will cost you something with the people whose approval you crave, remember a man who lost his crown and gained his Lord, and say the words he said. Refuse one thing this week, quietly and without drama, because Allah would not be pleased with it, even if refusing makes you the odd one in the room. That is the turban he was willing to set down. May Allah be pleased with Khalid ibn Sa'id ibn al-As, who was pulled from the fire and then walked the rest of his life toward Allah, and may Allah grasp us, too, by the hand before we fall.

This chapter follows the account of Khalid ibn Sa'id ibn al-As (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed. No Qur'anic verse is quoted, as the source did not cite a specific ayah.

Subay'a al-Aslamiyya

The Widow Whose Patience Was Misjudged

There is a kind of woman in the history of this religion whose name we learn almost by accident. She did not lead an army. She did not give away a fortune. She is not remembered for a single dramatic sentence shouted in the face of a tyrant. We come to know Subay'a al-Aslamiyya (may Allah be pleased with her) through something far quieter and far stranger: a question about waiting. About how long a grieving woman must wait before she is allowed to live again. And in the answer to that question, given by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself in a moment of her own confusion, an entire ruling of Islam was settled for every generation that would come after her.

She was, the early scholars tell us, one of the jurists among the companions. Not every companion was a scholar of their generation. Some were known for narrating, some for memorising, some for fighting, and a smaller number were trusted to teach and to give verdicts. Subay'a was among that smaller number. The fuqaha of Madinah and Kufa, the legal scholars of two great cities, studied her case and narrated from her. A woman whose early life we barely know became a source the learned men of Islam returned to again and again.

Among the first, and among the weak

We do not know much about where she came from. What we do know is that she was one of the first people on the earth to embrace Islam, alongside her husband, Sa'd ibn Khawla (may Allah be pleased with him). Together they were among that earliest handful of couples who accepted the message when accepting it cost everything. And because they accepted it early, they suffered early.

Sa'd was, by some accounts, a man of Persian origin who had come from Yemen, an ally attached to one of the tribes of Quraysh, a freed man, counted among the weak and the downtrodden of Makkah. He had no powerful clan to shield him. When the elites of the city looked at the Prophet ﷺ and his small band of followers, they saw people like Sa'd and were offended that such men sat in the same gathering as themselves. They pressed the Prophet ﷺ to send the poor ones away, to make his circle more respectable in their eyes. And Allah refused on his behalf. Some of the scholars say Sa'd was among the very people Allah was defending when He revealed this command:

Do not drive away those who call upon their Lord morning and evening, seeking nothing but His Face. You are in no way accountable for them, nor they for you; if you drove the believers away, you would become one of the evildoers.

QUR'AN 6:52

Think about what that means for Subay'a's household. The world had decided that her husband was insignificant, a man of no standing, easy to overlook. The heavens had decided otherwise. Allah Himself named such people worthy, declared that turning them away would be a sin, and taught that it is precisely through the weak and the sincere that His victory arrives. Subay'a began

her life in Islam married to a man the city dismissed and the Qur'an honoured.

Two migrations, every battle, and a long road home

When the persecution grew unbearable, Sa'd and Subay'a left. They made the migration to Abyssinia, crossing the sea to a land where they could worship without being hunted. They waited there. And when the call finally came to migrate to Madinah, they were among the very first to answer it, arriving in the new city while the community of the Prophet ﷺ was only beginning to gather.

There is a small detail that tells us how early they came. They stayed in the home of Kulthum ibn Hidm, one of the first of the Ansar to open his house to the migrants from Makkah. To have lodged with him is to have been at the front of that long line of exiles. Sa'd and Subay'a were people of the two migrations, the hijra to Abyssinia and the hijra to Madinah, and that double sacrifice made them beloved to the Prophet ﷺ.

Sa'd did not rest once he reached safety. He fought at Badr when he was only twenty-five years old, which tells us how young this couple was when they gave up their whole world for Allah. He fought in the battles that followed, dedicating himself to the Prophet ﷺ without the protection of any tribe behind him, only his faith. We know of no children from those years. We know only of two young people who had attached their entire lives to the messenger of Allah and to the cause he carried.

And then, after all of it, after Abyssinia and Madinah and Badr and the years of struggle, came the conquest of Makkah, and after it the Farewell Pilgrimage. Sa'd traveled back to the city that had once cast him out, now returning in the company of the Prophet

ﷺ. The Prophet ﷺ had a particular hope for the men who had migrated: that they would not return to Makkah and die there, but would complete their migration and pass away in Madinah, the city they had chosen for the sake of Allah. He disliked the thought of a muhajir dying back in the place he had fled. Yet Allah's decree moves on its own path. Sa'd ibn Khawla died during that pilgrimage, in Makkah, and the Prophet ﷺ was saddened by it. He had wanted the road to close where it should have closed, in Madinah. Instead Sa'd was granted a death in the season of Hajj, in a state of pilgrimage, which is its own kind of nobility. His life had come full circle: the weak man of Makkah, defended by revelation, who left for Abyssinia, settled in Madinah, fought every battle, and returned at last to die in the holy city beside the Prophet ﷺ on the greatest journey of his life.

A birth two weeks after a death

Subay'a was pregnant when her husband died.

She did not stay pregnant for long. Just two weeks after Sa'd's death, she gave birth. And it is here, in the narrow space between a death and a birth, that her name entered the books of Islamic law and stayed there.

The Qur'an teaches that the waiting period of a widow, the *iddah* she observes before she may remarry, is four months and ten days. That is the rule for a woman whose husband has died. But the Qur'an also teaches, in another verse, the waiting period of a woman who is pregnant:

If you are in doubt, the period of waiting will be three months for those women who have ceased menstruating and for those who have not [yet] menstruated; the waiting period of those who are pregnant will be until they deliver

their burden: God makes things easy for those who are mindful of Him.

QUR'AN 65:4

So a real question arose, the kind of question that an honest community must resolve. A widow who is also pregnant stands between two verses. Does she wait the four months and ten days set for the widow? Or does her waiting end the moment her child is born, as the verse on pregnancy says? When the child arrives before the four months are complete, which term governs her?

Subay'a's situation became the answer. She gave birth roughly two weeks after Sa'd died, and the ruling that emerged from her case is that her iddah ended with the birth, not with the longer term. When the child is delivered, the waiting is over. The companions, debating this very matter in later years, would return to Subay'a and say, in effect: this is how we know it is the shorter term and not the longer one. Her life, her loss, and her newborn child became a lamp by which a whole question of the law was lit.

A misjudged heart

What happened next is the part that should make us pause, because it speaks not about law but about the human heart, and about how quickly we misread one another.

After she gave birth, Subay'a prepared herself for marriage. She was still in her postnatal bleeding, the days of nifas, and she had already turned her face toward a new life. She was, the narrations suggest, a woman of striking beauty and good standing, and within that short window two men came to propose to her. Both were young, though one was older than the other, a man past his early thirties, perhaps into his forties, while the

other was younger still. She was inclined toward the younger of the two.

The older suitor, a man called Abu al-Sanabil, did not like that she might choose someone else. He wanted to slow her down, to buy time, hoping perhaps that her family would return and steer her toward him. So he reached for a religious-sounding objection. He said to her, in effect: How is it that you have made yourself available for marriage when you have not even completed your iddah? You still owe the four months and ten days. He was telling her she had no right to move on yet, that her grief had a fixed term she had failed to serve.

This is the moment to stop and notice something, because the Prophet ﷺ and the scholars after him noticed it too. There is a habit among people, old as the human heart, of judging the widow and the widower who remarry soon. We measure their love for the deceased by how long they mourn in visible sorrow. We attach suspicions to a quick remarriage, doubts about their loyalty, even doubts about their righteousness. We build a false idea of what patience is and then we punish people for failing a test Islam never set. None of that is from this religion. Among the companions you find some who never remarried after losing a spouse, and others who remarried almost at once, and neither group loved their dead any less. Both ways are honoured. Subay'a, despite a real love for the husband she had buried, was ready to begin again while still in her nifas, and there is nothing in Islam that should make us look down on her for it.

But Abu al-Sanabil's words unsettled her. Maybe he was right. Maybe her waiting was not over. So she did the only thing a sincere believer does when confused about the law: she went to the Prophet ﷺ and asked.

The Prophet ﷺ settles it

She came to him with her confusion laid bare, a new mother, recently widowed, told by a disappointed suitor that she was rushing what Allah had commanded her to endure. And the Prophet ﷺ confirmed for her, plainly, that her iddah had ended when she gave birth. She was free. She had done nothing wrong. The man's objection, dressed up as piety, had no weight against the ruling of Allah and His messenger.

There is a quiet justice in how it ended. Subay'a was free to choose, and the books tell us that for whatever reason it worked out between them, she married Abu al-Sanabil after all, the very man who had tried to delay her. The story does not hand us a tidy moral about which suitor was better. It simply leaves her where a free woman should be left: standing on her own decision, vindicated by the Prophet ﷺ, no longer at the mercy of anyone's judgment but her Lord's.

And so this woman, who had asked a single anxious question after a death, became the named source for one of the settled rulings of Islam. The fuqaha of Madinah and Kufa carried her case forward. When the learned wanted to know what a pregnant widow must do, they did not reach first for theory. They reached for Subay'a.

A hadith she carried, and a city she loved

There is one more thread to gather, and it ties her whole life together. Subay'a is also the narrator of a particular hadith, and given everything her family lived through, it is almost unbearably fitting that it came through her.

The Prophet ﷺ had hoped his migrants would die in Madinah, not in the Makkah they had left. He said that whoever among the

people is able to die in Madinah should do so, because he would intercede for whoever dies in that city. The meaning the scholars draw from it is plain and tender: a believer should try, if able, to live in Madinah, to stay there, to visit it, to pray in the mosque of the Prophet ﷺ, and to ask Allah for the gift of a death in his city and the blessing of his intercession.

It was Subay'a who carried that hadith to us. The woman whose husband, Sa'd ibn Khawla, had longed to complete his migration and die in Madinah, but was decreed instead a death in Makkah during the Hajj, is the same woman who preserved for the ummah the Prophet's own words about the honour of dying in his city. She held in her memory both the hope and its costliness. She knew, better than most, that Allah's decree does not always match even the noble wish of His prophet, and that He has His own reward stored up for each soul in whatever circumstance He places them.

As for Sa'd, what more could a believer want? A man who made both migrations, who fought in every battle of the Prophet ﷺ, and who died in the Farewell Pilgrimage in the company of the messenger of Allah. The Prophet ﷺ grieved that he did not die in Madinah, yes, but Allah gave him a death in pilgrimage, in worship, on the holiest journey of his life. May Allah be pleased with Sa'd and with Subay'a and with all the companions.

What Subay'a's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read Subay'a's story as a footnote, a case study, a name attached to a point of law. That would be to miss what her life is quietly asking of us. Three things, if we are listening.

The first is trust in Allah over the judgment of people. Subay'a was told, by a man who wore his objection like piety, that she was failing at patience, that her grief had a fixed length she owed and had not paid. The pressure of other people's opinions is one of the heaviest weights a believer carries, and it is heaviest exactly when those opinions arrive dressed in religious language. Subay'a did not crumble under it and she did not argue with it on the street. She took her confusion to the source of the truth, to the Prophet ﷺ, and let the ruling of Allah settle the matter over the verdict of the crowd. That is a discipline we need. When people measure our faith with rulers Allah never gave them, our task is not to win the argument with them. It is to go quietly back to what Allah and His messenger actually said, and to be content with that, even if the people are not. Seek the verdict of your Lord, not the approval of those watching you.

The second is contentment with the decree of Allah, even when it overrides our most beautiful hopes. The Prophet ﷺ himself wished for Sa'd to die in Madinah, and Allah decreed Makkah. If the wish of the Prophet ﷺ for one of his beloved companions could be answered differently by Allah, then surely our smaller plans will sometimes be answered differently too. Subay'a lived inside that truth. Her husband's death did not arrive the way anyone wanted it. Her child was born into grief. And yet she did not stand in judgment over Allah's choices. She received what came, observed what was due, and stepped forward into the life He still had for her. Faith is not getting the ending we scripted. It is trusting that the One who wrote the ending is more merciful and more wise than we are, and that His easing comes, as the verse says, for those mindful of Him.

The third is the freedom to begin again without shame, for the sake of Allah and not the sake of appearances. Subay'a teaches

us not to imprison ourselves, or others, inside performances of sorrow that Allah never asked for. There is a man or a woman reading this who has buried a spouse, or a hope, or a chapter of life, and who has been made to feel that moving forward is a betrayal. It is not. Allah does not ask you to perform grief for an audience. He asks for sincerity, ikhlas, that your waiting and your moving on are both done as acts of obedience to Him, on His timing, by His ruling, not to satisfy the watching eyes of people who will judge you either way. Live your obedience for the One who sees the heart, and let the rest go.

So take something small from her into today. If people are pressing their judgments on your faith, go back to what Allah actually said and rest there. If your life has not unfolded the way you begged it to, say with your whole heart that His decree is better than your plan. And if you are carrying a sorrow others want you to wear forever, give it instead to Allah and let Him decide when it ends. That is how Subay'a lived: not loudly, not famously, but in trust, in contentment, and in sincerity before her Lord. May Allah be pleased with Subay'a al-Aslamiyya, raise us upon a measure of her faith, and allow us to live in obedience to Him and to die in the city of His messenger, gathered under his intercession.

This chapter follows the account of Subay'a al-Aslamiyya (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (6:52, 65:4). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Nuaym ibn Abdullah

The One Who Redirected History

There are lives in the history of Islam that fill whole volumes, names so large that everyone around them is pushed quietly into the background. And then there are the people in that background, the ones who say a single sentence at a single moment, and that sentence bends the course of everything that follows. They are easy to walk past. We remember the great event and forget the unremarkable man who stood at the hinge of it.

Nuaym ibn Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with him) is one of those men. Most people who know the story of how Umar ibn al-Khattab came to Islam have never heard his name. Yet he was standing in the street that day. He was the one who spoke. And what he said changed history.

A man everyone loved

Nuaym was from Banu Adi, the same clan as Umar ibn al-Khattab, which made the two of them cousins. He came to Islam astonishingly early. In one narration, only ten people had embraced the message of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ before him, which would make him the eleventh Muslim on the earth. He was a young man when he believed, in the years when belief was a small and fragile thing, when the believers could be counted on a few hands and every new one mattered.

He was beloved by his people, and the reason is worth pausing over, because it is not the usual reason. He was not feared. He was not powerful. He was loved because he was good. He was known as a pleasant man, a man of fine character, a man of great generosity. And his generosity was not the easy kind that flows from having more than you need. As the story is told, Nuaym was simply the sort of person who was always there. If you needed him, he came. If there was a burden to carry, he carried part of it. He served, he helped, he took care of people, and he did it so consistently and so quietly that no one in his city had a complaint against him. In a place like Makkah, hard and proud and quick to feud, a man whom everyone praises and no one resents is a rare thing. Nuaym was that man.

He carried, in particular, the weight of the widows and the orphans of his clan. They relied on him. He stood between many vulnerable people and the hardness of the world, and he did it not for a single season but as a way of life.

The faith he kept hidden

Here is the part that surprises most readers. Although Nuaym was the eleventh person to accept Islam, he did not announce it. For a long time he kept his faith hidden among his people. He believed, he prayed in his heart toward his Lord, but he did not stand up in Makkah and declare himself.

It is tempting to judge that quickly, but the story does not ask us to. Allah places His servants in different circumstances, and not every believer in those early years carried the same task. Some were sent out to suffer openly. Some were held back to do a different kind of good. Nuaym was needed where he was. The widows and orphans who depended on him would have lost their protector the moment he was driven out or cut off. So he kept his

faith close, and he kept serving, and he waited for Allah to open the door.

That hidden faith is exactly what made the most important moment of his life possible. Because no one suspected him, Nuaym could stand in the open street, among the people of Quraysh, and not be watched. He was simply one of their own, the good man everyone trusted. And that is where history found him.

The man with the sword

Umar ibn al-Khattab came down the streets of Makkah with his sword drawn and his face unable to hide what was in it. He was a young man too, strong and decided, and he was on his way to end the matter once and for all. The new religion was tearing at the fabric of his people, splitting families, dividing the city, and Umar had resolved to cut the problem out at its root. He was going to kill Muhammad ﷺ.

It was Nuaym who saw him. Nuaym, the cousin, the man no one knew was a believer, watched Umar marching with murder in his hands and could not stand by. He stopped him and asked him where he was going. Umar told him plainly: I am on my way to Muhammad ibn Abdullah ﷺ, to end this tribulation that has fallen on our people, to end this fitna in Makkah.

Now Nuaym had a choice, and only a moment to make it. He could have stepped aside. He could have argued, and an argument with an enraged Umar might have ended badly and changed nothing. Instead he did something quietly brilliant. He turned Umar's attention away from the Prophet ﷺ and back toward Umar's own household. You should probably go to your

own family first, he told him, and see what is happening there, because they too have entered this religion.

It was a single sentence, and it was a kind of redirection. It sent Umar home. And it was at home, confronting his sister Fatimah and what she had embraced, that the heart of Umar ibn al-Khattab was overturned. The man who had set out that morning to kill the Prophet ﷺ went instead, that very day, to declare his faith in him. The day Umar came to Islam was a day of strength and victory for the Muslims, a turning point everyone remembers.

And the snap judgment that set it in motion, the small wise word at the hinge of it, belonged to Nuaym ibn Abdullah. He did not plan the conversion of Umar. No human being could have. But Allah, who is the best of planners, placed the right man in the right street with the right words on his tongue, and through him redirected the course of an entire ummah. This is the quiet truth Nuaym's life teaches before it teaches anything else: that the greatest events often turn on a person no one is looking at.

The one his people would not let go

Some time after Umar, Nuaym declared his Islam openly. And then, when the migration to Madinah began and the believers were leaving Makkah one after another, something unusual happened. Banu Adi, his own clan, asked him not to go.

They were not persecuting him. They left him alone. The arrangement was simple and it was honest: stay on the religion you have chosen, we will not harass you, we will not drive you out, we will not come after you. Just stay. And the reason they wanted him to stay was the same reason everyone had always loved him. He was carrying their widows and their orphans. Too many people in Makkah leaned on him for him to leave without

leaving a wound. We need you here, they told him, for the good that you are doing.

So Nuaym stayed. He accepted it. He did not migrate to Abyssinia, and he did not at first migrate to Madinah, not because he loved Makkah more than the Prophet ﷺ, but because the people who depended on him could not spare him. There is a kind of faith that proves itself by leaving everything behind, and the muhajirun showed us that faith. And there is another kind that proves itself by staying exactly where Allah has put you and continuing to serve the people in front of you. Nuaym lived the second kind, without complaint, for the sake of those who had no one else.

Hudaybiyah, and forty hearts

His moment to come to the Prophet ﷺ arrived at last, and when it came, he did not come alone.

It was at Hudaybiyah. The Prophet ﷺ and his companions had set out from Madinah toward Makkah, and there at Hudaybiyah the believers gathered around him and gave him their pledge. Into that gathering walked Nuaym ibn Abdullah, and behind him walked forty men from Banu Adi, forty converts to Islam. This was the very clan that had once been part of the hard world of Makkah, the tribe whose people had harmed others over this religion. And Nuaym, by his character, by his patience, by the long quiet years of being a man everyone trusted, had won them over. He brought them to their Lord. So as the Prophet ﷺ was receiving the pledge of the people of Madinah, he was also receiving the shahadah of forty people of Makkah, all of them from Banu Adi, all of them brought by Nuaym.

When the Prophet ﷺ saw him, he stood up. He was glad. He embraced Nuaym and kissed him on the head, and he said to him: your people, O Nuaym, are better than my people. Your home is better than my home. Your tribe is better than my tribe.

Think about why the Prophet ﷺ said that. His own people, Quraysh, had harmed him and driven him out. But Banu Adi had been patient with Nuaym, had let him keep his faith, had eventually followed him into Islam itself. So the Prophet ﷺ praised them.

Nuaym would not accept the praise for himself. Rather, he said, your people are better than my people, O Messenger of Allah. He was trying, in his humility, to turn the honor back to the Prophet ﷺ. Your people expelled you, he said, but Allah gave you the reward and the blessing of the hijrah for it. My people held me back from the hijrah. He grieved that he had been kept from the migration that others had been granted. And the Prophet ﷺ answered the heart of it: that even when the harm was done, Allah had turned that harm into reward and blessing for him. What looked like expulsion had been honored by Allah as hijrah.

From that day, Nuaym was at the Prophet's side.

The clearing of a throat in Paradise

There is one more thing about Nuaym, and it is the most beautiful, and it is the reason his name survives at all in the form it does. People did not usually call him Nuaym ibn Abdullah. They called him an-Nahham. And that nickname came from the Prophet ﷺ himself.

The Prophet ﷺ said about him that on the night of the ascension, the night he was raised through the heavens, he entered Paradise, and there he heard the nahmah of Nuaym. A nahmah,

as most of the scholars explain it, is the small sound a person makes when they clear their throat. So the Prophet ﷺ was saying that while he walked in Paradise, he heard Nuaym there, heard the quiet, ordinary, human sound of him clearing his throat, and from that he was given his name: an-Nahham, the one whose throat-clearing was heard in the Garden.

It is the same kind of glad tiding that was given to Bilal, whose footsteps the Prophet ﷺ heard ahead of him in Paradise. Here was a man, still walking the streets of Makkah, still carrying the burdens of widows and orphans, still keeping a quiet faith, and his Lord had already placed the sound of him in Paradise. The good he did in secret had reached a destination he could not yet see.

Nuaym lived on as a soldier of Islam. The man who had once stood in the street and redirected Umar away from the Prophet ﷺ later gave his pledge of allegiance to that same Umar as the leader of the believers, and served as a soldier under him as he had served under Abu Bakr before him. And then Nuaym ibn Abdullah died as a martyr, a shaheed, in the Battle of Yarmuk, in the time of Umar's leadership. The throat whose sound was heard in the Garden fell silent on a battlefield, in the service of the faith he had carried so quietly for so long.

What Nuaym's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read this life as a story about good character, and to come away admiring a kind man who helped widows and orphans. That is true, but it is not the heart of it. Nuaym's life is a question put to our own iman, and the question is sharper than it first appears.

He served for the sake of Allah when no one knew he was serving for the sake of Allah. For years his faith was hidden, and his good deeds looked, from the outside, like simple decency, the helpfulness of a pleasant man. But Allah saw what Makkah did not. Allah heard the sound of him in Paradise while his neighbors still thought of him as nothing more than a good cousin who could be relied on. This is ikhlas, sincerity, the rarest and most precious thing: to do the deed for Allah alone, content that He has seen it, even when the world reads it as something ordinary and gives you no credit for faith at all. Ask yourself how much of your good would survive if no one ever knew it was for Allah. Nuaym's good survived precisely because it was, all along, for Allah and not for them.

He trusted Allah's placement of him. He was not sent to suffer publicly like the persecuted, and he was not granted the hijrah he longed for. He was asked, instead, to stay, to keep serving the vulnerable people who had no one else, and to wait. He did not resent his portion or compare it bitterly to the portions of others. He accepted where Allah had put him and did the good that was in front of him. Most of us spend our faith wishing we had someone else's circumstances: their ease, their platform, their chance to do something visible and great. Nuaym's life asks whether you can serve Allah fully in the small, unglamorous place He has actually assigned you, carrying the burdens that are actually yours to carry, without needing the role to look impressive.

And his life asks whether you understand how Allah uses people. Nuaym did not convert Umar. He spoke one wise sentence and stepped out of the way, and Allah did the rest. This is how the believer should hold his own efforts: do the good in front of you, say the true word when the moment comes, and leave the

outcome entirely to the One who is the best of planners. You will rarely see the whole shape of what your small act sets in motion. Nuaym could not have known that a single redirection in a Makkan street would help bring Umar ibn al-Khattab to Islam and strengthen the entire ummah. He simply did right in the moment, and trusted Allah with everything beyond it.

So take this into your ordinary life, where most of your faith will actually be lived. Do one good thing today that no one will know was for the sake of Allah. Carry one burden for someone who cannot repay you and cannot praise you. Say one true, gentle word in a moment when it matters, and then let go of the result and leave it to your Lord. This is the way Nuaym lived, hidden, sincere, content with his place, faithful in the small moment that turned out not to be small at all. The Prophet ﷺ heard the quiet sound of him in Paradise. May Allah be pleased with Nuaym ibn Abdullah, may He grant us a measure of his sincerity and his trust, and may He gather us with him and with the righteous companions, those we know and those we do not, in the highest gardens of al-Firdaws.

This chapter follows the account of Nuaym ibn Abdullah (RA), known as an-Nahham, in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The transcript cites no specific Qur'anic verse, so none is quoted here; where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Ukasha ibn al-Mihsan

He Who Got There First

There are companions whose names survive in long chronicles, and there are companions whose names survive in a single sentence. Ukasha ibn al-Mihsan (may Allah be pleased with him) is remembered, by most who remember him at all, for one short exchange in a crowded gathering in Madinah, four words from the mouth of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that turned a man's whole life into a proverb. "Ukasha beat you to it." Centuries later, the Arabs would still use his name as a word. To call someone an Ukasha was to call him a forerunner, the first to arrive, the one who got there ahead of everyone else. It is even said that to see him in a dream was a sign that you would precede others toward something good.

But a man does not become a proverb by luck. Behind those four words lies a whole life of arriving first, and it is that life, not just the sentence, that this chapter wants to recover.

A family that ran toward the light

He was Ukasha ibn al-Mihsan al-Asadi, an ally of the clan of Banu Abd Shams, a man of Makkah who heard the message of the Prophet ﷺ in its earliest, most dangerous days and answered it. He was not old when he believed. Neither were his siblings. They were among the youth of the city, and they came into Islam as a

family, almost together, as though some shared instinct in their blood pulled all of them toward the same light at once.

His sister was Umm Qays bint Mihsan (may Allah be pleased with her), counted among the very first to embrace Islam. She lived an extraordinarily long life, past a hundred years, long enough that the generation after the companions would sit and learn hadith from her and carry her words forward. His brother was Abu Sinan ibn Mihsan (may Allah be pleased with him), and his place in the story of this religion is its own kind of honor: by one narration, when the Prophet ﷺ called the believers to pledge their lives to him beneath the tree at Hudaibiyyah, in that pledge that Allah Himself declared He was pleased with, it was Abu Sinan who stepped to the front and was the first to put his hand in the Prophet's hand. Two more brothers, Amr and Wahb (may Allah be pleased with them), are also counted among the first Muslims, though history has kept little else of them.

Picture that household. Four brothers and a sister, all young, all early, all rushing forward. Whatever else can be said about Ukasha, this much is clear from the beginning: being first was not a single moment for him. It was the climate of the home he came from. His family did not wait to see how things would turn out before committing. They moved toward the good before the road was safe, and they kept moving.

The man himself

When the books describe Ukasha himself, they describe a man easy to love. He was, they say, one of the most handsome of men and one of the most generous. He wore a wide smile, the kind that warms a gathering before a word is spoken. And he had a quality that mattered more than any of these: when he gave himself to something, he gave himself completely. He did not do

things by halves. Whatever he committed to, he poured into it and then surpassed what was asked of him.

The Prophet ﷺ saw this in him and trusted it. Early in the life of the Muslim community, he placed Ukasha at the head of a battalion of forty men, and Ukasha was granted much success in that command. He had left Makkah behind, abandoning home and property and security, and made the long migration to Madinah. So he was a muhajir, one of those who emigrated for the sake of Allah. And then he was something more. He stood at Badr.

The sword that came from a stick

Badr was the day Allah separated truth from falsehood, the day a small and outnumbered band of believers faced the might of Quraysh, and it left its mark on every man who fought in it. To be a Badri, a veteran of Badr, was to belong to the highest rank of the companions. Ukasha was there. And in the thick of the fighting, his sword broke.

A man in the middle of a battle, weaponless, would feel the ground shift under him. Ukasha came to the Prophet ﷺ. He did not panic and he did not improvise on his own. He asked. "O Messenger of Allah, what should I fight with?" The Prophet ﷺ reached down and picked up a wooden stick, an ordinary length of wood, and handed it to him. "Fight with this," he said.

Stop for a moment on what happened next, because the whole character of the man is hidden inside it. He was handed a stick in the middle of a battle and told to fight with it. He did not argue. He did not hesitate. He did not measure the stick against the swords coming at him and calculate his odds. If the Prophet ﷺ

said fight with it, then he would fight with it. That was the entire reasoning. He took the stick.

And as he swung it, the wood turned in his hand into a sword, gleaming and unmistakable, a blade unlike any other, so distinct that no one could confuse it for an ordinary weapon. The companions came to call it the sword of aid, the sword of divine help. Ukasha carried that sword for the rest of his life, and everyone knew its story. It had been given to him from above, through the hand of the Prophet ﷺ, and he would wield it for the sake of Allah until his last day.

It is worth seeing the deeper thing here. The miracle was the Prophet's. But the miracle was placed into the hand of a man who had already decided to obey before he knew what obedience would cost him or give him. The sword came to Ukasha because Ukasha reached for a stick in pure trust. Allah honors the one who moves first and asks no questions.

Four words in Madinah

So here is the position of this man. He embraced Islam early, when it was hardest. He commanded forty men and brought them through. He left everything in Makkah and emigrated. He fought at Badr and walked away carrying a sword that the heavens had given him. Then, one day in Madinah, the Prophet ﷺ stood before the people and described something extraordinary.

There is a group from my ummah, he told them, seventy thousand strong, whose faces will shine on the Day of Judgment like the full moon. They will enter Paradise without any punishment and without any reckoning. No accounting will be

taken from them. No questions will be put to them. They will simply be admitted.

It is the kind of promise that stops the breath. To stand before Allah on that Day and be waved through, no record opened, no deed weighed, no fear of the scales, straight into the Garden. The room must have gone still.

And Ukasha stood up. He lifted the sheet covering him and he said, "O Messenger of Allah, ask Allah to make me one of them." And the Prophet ﷺ answered, "You are one of them." In one narration he raised his hands and said, "O Allah, make him one of them."

Then a second man rose. He had seen it work. He said, "O Messenger of Allah, ask Allah to make me one of them too." And the Prophet ﷺ gave the answer that would outlive everyone in the room. "Ukasha beat you to it." Sabaqaka biha Ukasha. Ukasha got there first.

The scholars who studied this narration, which is recorded in al-Bukhari, offered more than one reading of that moment. Perhaps the place among the seventy thousand was a particular gift for that gathering, and the second man, sincere though he may have been, simply did not reach Ukasha's rank. Perhaps, others suggested, the second man was not even a true believer at heart, and the Prophet ﷺ, in the perfection of his manners, would not refuse him outright nor make a supplication he could not make, and so he closed the door gently, with a word about Ukasha rather than a word about the man. Because the man is never named, both readings are left open. But whichever is true, one thing is not in question: Ukasha earned his place. He did not stumble into it.

Why he was worthy

This is the part that matters most, and it is the part most easily missed. It would be easy to hear "Ukasha beat you to it" and imagine a man who happened to be quick, who got lucky in a crowded room, who raised his hand half a second before someone else and won a prize. That is not what happened. Ukasha did not luck into Paradise. He had spent his whole life building the thing he asked for.

When you ask Allah for something, your life should already be moving in the direction of the request. A man who asks to be among those admitted to Paradise without reckoning, and who has spent his years migrating, commanding, fighting, obeying, and giving, is not asking for a stranger's reward. He is asking for the natural end of the road he is already walking. Ukasha's request and Ukasha's life pointed the same way. The scholars called this *sidq*, truthfulness, a sincere intention matched by action, the inside and the outside saying the same thing.

This is exactly what Allah praises in those who kept faith with Him through everything. About the believers who stood firm in the hardest hour, He revealed:

There are men among the believers who honoured their pledge to God: some of them have fulfilled it by death, and some are still waiting. They have not changed in the least.

QUR'AN 33:23

They have not changed in the least. That is Ukasha. The promise of Paradise did not soften him. He was given the highest guarantee a human being can receive, the assurance that he would enter the Garden without even being questioned, and what did he do with it? He did not retire. He did not coast. Most of us,

handed a guarantee like that, would conclude that our work was done and our striving over. Ukasha concluded the opposite. He stayed at the front. Whenever the Prophet ﷺ called, Ukasha was among the first to come forward, the same as he had always been.

And when the Prophet ﷺ passed from this world and the community trembled, when Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him) summoned the loyal companions to defend the religion against those who had turned back from it, it was Ukasha, once again, who came forward early. He carried the sword that had once been a stick. He went out in the wars against the apostates, in the campaign against Musaylimah the liar, and there, sword in hand, fighting for the same cause he had served all his life, he was killed. He died a martyr. The man who had been promised Paradise without reckoning sealed his life in the way that opens Paradise most surely of all.

What Ukasha's life asks of our faith

It is tempting to read a story like this and take from it only a lesson in eagerness, to admire how quick Ukasha was and resolve to raise our own hand a little faster next time. That is too small. His life is not asking us to be quick. It is asking us to be true.

Notice first what the four words were really rewarding. They were not rewarding a clever man who spoke up at the right second. They were rewarding a man whose whole life had already answered the question before he asked it. This is the heart of *siddiq*, of being truthful with Allah: that what you ask of Him and how you live before Him are pointed in the same direction. It is a strange and common thing to ask Allah for Paradise on a tongue, while the days are spent walking away from it. Ukasha asked with

his mouth for the same thing his hands and his feet and his sword had been asking for, for years. Examine your own requests. When you raise your hands and ask Allah for nearness to Him, for forgiveness, for the Garden, does the rest of your life lean toward the thing you are asking for, or away from it? Faith that is true is faith where the inside and the outside say the same word.

Notice, too, the stick. He was handed a piece of wood in the middle of a battle and told it would serve, and he reached for it without a flicker of doubt. We are rarely tested that dramatically. But every day, the commands of Allah and the guidance of His Prophet ﷺ are handed to us, and very often they look, to the calculating eye, like sticks against swords. Give from wealth you feel you cannot spare. Forgive someone the world says you are entitled to resent. Hold to a prayer when sleep and ease pull the other way. Tell the truth when a lie would be easier and safer. The believing response is Ukasha's response: if it comes from Allah and His Messenger ﷺ, I will take it, and I will not stand there weighing it against my odds. Obedience offered in trust, before you can see how it will turn out, is the kind of obedience Allah turns into a shining thing in your hand.

And notice, most of all, what he did with a guarantee. He had every reason to relax and he did not. This cuts against something in all of us, the quiet hope that there is a point at which we have done enough and can rest. Ukasha never reached for that exit. The promise made him work harder, not less, because love does not stop serving once it is sure of the beloved. It serves more. Real iman is not a transaction you complete and then close; it is a fire that, the more it is fed, the more it wants to give. The companion who was promised Paradise without reckoning died fighting for Allah anyway, because the reward was never the only reason he ran.

So take this man into an ordinary week. Do not wait to be asked. When you see a good that needs doing in your home or your masjid or your street, a kindness no one is offering, a sunnah gone quiet that you could revive, a gap that someone ought to fill, do not look around for who will go first. Be the one who goes first, and do it for Allah, wanting nothing back from anyone who might be watching. That is how Ukasha lived, always at the front, sincere all the way through, and it is a place that is never crowded, because so few are willing to take it. May Allah be pleased with Ukasha ibn al-Mihsan and his siblings, may He give us a share of their sidq and their forwardness toward every good, and may He gather us with them among the seventy thousand who enter the Garden without fear, in the company of the Prophet



This chapter follows the account of Ukasha ibn al-Mihsan (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (33:23). Where the histories carry more than one narration, both readings have been noted as the scholars left them.

Zaynab bint Khuzayma

The Mother of the Poor

There are companions whose lives fill volumes, whose words and battles and journeys are recorded down to the smallest detail. And then there are companions about whom history kept almost nothing, a handful of facts, a single trait, a few months of a life. Zaynab bint Khuzayma (may Allah be pleased with her) is among the second kind. She is, in all likelihood, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ about whom we know the least. We do not have her sayings. We do not have long stories of her days. What survives is one word that the people fastened to her name, in the time of ignorance and again in Islam: the mother of the poor.

Sometimes a single word is enough to tell you what a life was for.

A daughter of believing women

She belonged to a tribe of the Najd region called Banu Hilal, the people of her father, Khuzayma. Her name itself was a gift. The scholars say Zaynab carries the sense of a beautiful flower, and that it can be read as Zaynatul-ab, the jewel of her father, a name given to a woman in whom certain beauties are gathered. And by every account, she was a woman of whom people spoke only in the best of ways.

But it is her mother's side that opens a remarkable window. Her mother was Hind bint Awf, and through that mother Zaynab was woven into a circle of women the Prophet ﷺ himself once called

the believing sisters. She was the half-sister of Maymuna bint al-Harith (may Allah be pleased with her), the last woman the Prophet ﷺ would ever marry. The two of them shared the same mother. So it happened, by the planning of Allah, that the Prophet ﷺ would be married to both of these sisters in the course of his life, though never at the same time.

The same mother gave Islam an astonishing line of daughters. There was Salma bint Umayy, the wife of Hamza (may Allah be pleased with him). There was Asma bint Umayy, who would be the wife of Ja'far, then of Abu Bakr, then of Ali (may Allah be pleased with them all). There was Lubaba bint al-Harith, Umm al-Fadl, the wife of al-Abbas and the mother of Abdullah ibn Abbas. There was another Lubaba, the mother of Khalid (may Allah be pleased with him). Sisters and half-sisters from one mother, scattered across the noblest households of the early ummah, and this only scratches the surface. When you trace the family of Zaynab bint Khuzayma, you find yourself standing in the middle of a quiet network of righteous women who carried faith into home after home. She was raised among that kind of woman, and it shows.

A life marked by loss

Zaynab was no stranger to grief by the time the Prophet ﷺ knew her. Her life before him had already been a procession of marriages cut short.

Her first husband was Tufayl ibn al-Harith ibn Abd al-Muttalib, a cousin of the Prophet ﷺ. At some point he divorced her. She was then married to his brother, a great companion named Ubayda ibn al-Harith (may Allah be pleased with him), one of the early believers, a man whose own story belongs to the firsts. Ubayda

died at the Battle of Badr, or from the wounds he carried away from it. So she became a widow.

Then she was married to Abdullah ibn Jahsh (may Allah be pleased with him), the cousin of the Prophet ﷺ, another great companion, and the brother of Zaynab bint Jahsh, who would herself one day be a wife of the Prophet ﷺ. (It is easy to confuse the two women who share the name Zaynab; this is the one called bint Khuzayma.) And Abdullah ibn Jahsh fell as a martyr at the Battle of Uhud. So she was widowed again.

There is a detail here that is worth pausing over, because it links grief to grief in a way that is almost too poignant to be coincidence. At Uhud, Hamza and Abdullah ibn Jahsh were buried together in a single grave. And the two women left behind, the widow of Hamza and the widow of Abdullah ibn Jahsh, were sisters. Salma bint Umayy had lost Hamza. Zaynab bint Khuzayma had lost Abdullah. Two sisters, in one day, made widows of two men who would share one grave. Imagine the house those two sisters returned to after Uhud. Imagine the silence in it.

Married into the household of mercy

After Uhud, a new spirit moved through the community of Madinah. The Prophet ﷺ urged his companions to step forward and marry the widows and care for the orphans the battle had left behind, and the Qur'an itself turned the hearts of the believers toward this care. It was not a season for men to look for ease. It was a season to shelter those who had lost their shelter.

It was in this spirit that the Prophet ﷺ saw Zaynab bint Khuzayma, a woman three times married, twice widowed, and well into her years, and proposed to her. There is a lesson in that

proposal alone. The world tends to look at a woman who has lost two husbands and been divorced by a third and see someone diminished, someone whose best chapters are behind her. The Prophet ﷺ looked at her and saw a believing woman who deserved honor and shelter, and he raised her into his own household. The marriage was settled in the month of Ramadan, four years after the Hijra, not long after his marriage to Hafsa (may Allah be pleased with her). The dowry was four hundred dirhams. And so this woman who had buried two husbands moved into the apartments of the Prophet ﷺ, into the household of the Messenger of Allah himself.

She would have him for only a few months. But of those months, one was Ramadan.

The mother of the poor

Here is the one thing history would not let go of. Before Islam ever reached her, the people already called Zaynab bint Khuzayma by a title: Umm al-Masakin, the mother of the poor. This was not a name Islam invented for her. It was a name she had earned in the days of ignorance, in a society that did not reward such things, simply because she could not stop giving to the destitute.

The Prophet ﷺ taught that people are like buried treasure: the best of them in the days of ignorance are the best of them in Islam, if they are given understanding. Zaynab is a living proof of that saying. The mercy was already in her. Islam did not create it; Islam took it and rooted it, and gave it the one thing it had been missing, an aim. Now her generosity had a direction. Now every coin she gave away and every meal she handed to a hungry stranger was reaching for the pleasure of Allah and the reward of the hereafter.

They said of her that no food ever stayed the night in her home. Whatever extra she had went out the door to someone who needed it, and she would often lie down hungry herself, having given away what was in front of her. There is a particular kind of faith in that. It is one thing to give from what you do not need. It is another to give the food off your own table and then accept hunger as the price of someone else's fullness, and to do it not once but as a way of life. This was true in Makkah. It stayed true in Madinah. And it stayed true even after she entered the home of the Prophet ﷺ, the most generous of all creation, the man Abdullah ibn Abbas described as more generous than the sending wind, and most generous of all in Ramadan, when the angel Jibril would come to him.

So consider what that house must have been. Picture the home of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and Zaynab bint Khuzayma in the month of Ramadan: the most generous man who ever lived, and beside him a woman the people had long ago crowned the mother of the poor, neither of them able to hold on to anything while a needy person stood nearby. The charity that must have flowed out of that small home that month is almost beyond imagining. It was a household that emptied itself for Allah, on purpose, again and again.

Buried by his own hands

By the decree of Allah, Zaynab bint Khuzayma died only about three months after her marriage to the Prophet ﷺ. Three months, one of them Ramadan. A short share of his company, and a short share of this world. And the single thing history hands down about her time as a mother of the believers is her generosity. Umm al-Masakin, the mother of the poor, was gone.

The scholars stop here to notice what Allah honored her with at the end, and the honors are not small.

She was the only wife, other than Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her), whom the Prophet ﷺ buried with his own two hands in his lifetime. Think of what that means. The same hands that had lowered the first believer into her grave now lowered Zaynab into hers. It is a particular kind of grief for him, and it is a particular kind of honor for her, to be returned to the earth by the hands of the Messenger of Allah himself.

She was also the first of his wives to be laid in the row of the Prophet's wives in al-Baqi, the graveyard of Madinah. In time the other mothers of the believers would pass away and be buried in that same place, all of them except Khadijah and Maymuna (may Allah be pleased with them). Zaynab was the first to rest there. She opened the row that the mothers of the believers would one day fill. A woman the world barely recorded, given the first place in the most honored company of women this ummah has known. That is the way of Allah with the sincere: He raises quietly what the world overlooks.

And there is a quiet thread that runs from her into the next chapter of the Prophet's household. After she died, the next woman the Prophet ﷺ married was Umm Salama (may Allah be pleased with her), herself a widow of Uhud's aftermath. Umm Salama said that when she married the Prophet ﷺ, she moved into the very home of Umm al-Masakin, Zaynab bint Khuzayma. The mother of the poor left behind a doorway through which mercy kept passing.

What Zaynab's life asks of our faith

One of the teachers of this seerah drew out the lesson that lingers longest. The Prophet ﷺ taught that nothing extends a person's life like charity, and in other narrations, like keeping the ties of kinship, and like supplication. Allah grants such a person a fuller share of their time on earth, so that they can increase their share in the hereafter. Zaynab bint Khuzayma was given only three months with the Prophet ﷺ. And it may be, and Allah knows best, that her lifelong giving to the poor was itself a cause by which her life was lengthened in worth, even as it was short in days, until the Prophet ﷺ saw something in her that Allah wished to honor. We cannot know the unseen accounting. What we can see is the barakah: how much blessing Allah poured into a life that poured itself out for Him.

That is the question her life puts to us. We tend to measure a life by its length and its noise, by how many years it lasted and how many people noticed. Zaynab had few years as a mother of the believers and made almost no noise at all. History kept one word about her. But that one word was enough to make the Prophet ﷺ bury her with his own hands and to make Allah honor her above almost every wife. So what are you filling your days with? Not what will be remembered by people, but what is being recorded with Allah?

The quality to take from her is generosity for the sake of Allah, the kind that costs you and that you do not advertise. Notice that Zaynab gave when there was no Islam to reward her, and then gave more when there was. Notice that she gave until she slept hungry, not because she had so much, but because the need in front of her mattered more than her own comfort. This is not a virtue reserved for the wealthy. The mother of the poor was not rich; she was simply unwilling to keep what someone else needed more. In an ordinary life today, that looks like the meal

you give away quietly, the help you offer before you are asked, the money you spend on a struggling person with no one watching, the share of your provision you let go of for Allah and never mention again. The Prophet ﷺ himself used to ask Allah for the love of the poor, hubb al-masakin. Zaynab lived that prayer until it became her name.

And here is what should move your heart. What she gave away was not lost. It came back to her as barakah in this life and, by the mercy of Allah, as a place of honor in the next, a grave dug by the hands of the Messenger ﷺ, the first place in the row of the mothers of the believers. The world might have seen only a woman who kept giving until her cupboards were bare. Allah saw a treasure. This is the promise that should change how you spend: what you give for His sake, He keeps for you, and He multiplies it, and He may answer it with honor you never imagined.

So do one thing today the way she did it. Find someone in need and give, without a word, without a witness, for Allah alone. Let one act of your generosity be a secret between you and Him. That is how the mother of the poor lived, in mercy, in sincerity, in trust that Allah sees what people do not, and it is a path still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Zaynab bint Khuzayma, and with all the mothers of the believers, fill our hearts with the love of the poor, and let us learn to give the way she gave, for His face alone.

This chapter follows the account of Zaynab bint Khuzayma (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). It refers in prose to the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ on charity, the ties of kinship, and supplication; no Qur'anic verse is quoted, as the source did not cite a specific verse. Where the histories carry

more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abu Ahmad Abd ibn Jahsh

The Other Blind Companion

There is a kind of believer the histories almost forget. He fights in no famous battle. He commands no army. He leaves behind only a few lines, a handful of scenes, a name that surfaces beside more famous names and then slips away again. Abu Ahmad Abd ibn Jahsh (may Allah be pleased with him) is one of these. He was blind. He could not march out with the armies. He was robbed of his home by his own father-in-law and carried that wound for the rest of his days. And yet, when you sit with the little we have of him, you find a man whose whole life was a quiet argument that Allah does not measure His servants the way the world does.

He is known in the seerah, simply, as the other blind companion. The more famous one, Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum, is remembered in verses of the Qur'an. But there were two men in those early days who could not see with their eyes and who saw, with their hearts, exactly what mattered. This is the story of the second one.

A family that walked out first

To understand Abu Ahmad, you have to begin with his family, because his family was among the very first to give everything up.

He was a son of the house of Jahsh, and they were a remarkable household. His brother was Abdullah ibn Jahsh, the man who would later be named the first commander in Islam, a leader so trusted by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that he was given a sealed letter and sent out not knowing what it contained. His sister was Hamnah bint Jahsh. And another of his sisters was Zaynab bint Jahsh, who would one day become a wife of the Prophet ﷺ and a mother of the believers. This was no ordinary family. When faith came to them, it came to almost all of them at once.

They were among those who accepted Islam early, in the circle around Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), entering the religion together as a household. And when the persecution in Makkah grew unbearable, when believing in one God became a thing that cost you your safety, this family did not wait to see how it would turn out. They left.

The historian Ibn Ishaq records that the first person to go out and migrate to Abyssinia was Abdullah ibn Jahsh, and that he took with him his family, including his brother Abu Ahmad. Stop and feel the weight of that. Of all the first believers, of all the persecuted in Makkah, this household was in the very first group to abandon their homes and cross the sea to a strange land for the sake of Allah. They were the firsts among the firsts: the earliest to taste what it means to lose everything familiar because you will not surrender your faith.

Abu Ahmad made that journey blind. His wife went with him, and she was no ordinary woman either. She was al-Far'ah, a daughter of Abu Sufyan, the same Abu Sufyan who would lead Quraysh against the Muslims for years. Another of Abu Sufyan's daughters, Umm Habibah, would herself become a wife of the Prophet ﷺ. So here was a blind man, married into the most

powerful enemy household of Makkah, walking out of his city among the very first to flee for his faith. The threads of these families wind around each other in ways that only Allah fully arranges.

The man who needed no guide

Abu Ahmad was not born blind the way Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum was. He lost his sight early in life. But blindness, for him, never became a cage.

What people remembered about him, what they spoke of with a kind of wonder, was this: he could move through Makkah entirely on his own. He needed no hand on his arm, no companion to steer him. He climbed its hilltops. He walked its mountain paths. He made his way through its valleys with no guide at all. And anyone who has stood in that terrain knows it is not gentle ground. Makkah is rock and slope and uneven stone. For a man who could not see to walk it freely, without help, was something the people noticed and never quite got over.

He even put it into verse. He spoke of Makkah as a blessed and beloved valley, a place that held his family and his guests and his visitors, the people who came back to him and to whom he returned. My roots are here, he said in effect, my people are here, and here, in this city, I walk with no guide. There is something deeply moving in that line. A blind man claiming the hardest ground in Arabia as his own, refusing to be defined by what he could not do, finding in the very place that would later reject him a home he loved with his whole heart.

This is worth holding onto before the harder parts of his story arrive. Abu Ahmad was not a man waiting for pity. He was capable, independent, rooted, a poet of his own city. Whatever

Allah took from his eyes, He had given him elsewhere, in strength of body and clarity of soul. The world saw a disabled man. Allah saw a servant who would walk the mountains of Makkah and then walk out of them entirely, for Him.

The house that was stolen

The house of Jahsh had homes among the finest in Makkah. Their dwellings sat together, in the quarter where the family lived, and they were counted among the most valuable properties in the city. When the family left for Abyssinia, those homes stood empty. And empty wealth, in a city that hated them, did not stay safe for long.

Abu Jahl and Uqbah came to the abandoned homes of the Jahsh family. Abu Jahl entered a house that belonged to them and began to take what was inside it, and then to sell it off. Think of the order of these events. This was the same family caught up in the affair of the caravan and the early raids, the family of the first commander. And now they were also among the very first to have their belongings seized and sold simply because they had chosen Allah over Makkah. Their reward for migrating first was to be robbed first.

When word of this reached the Prophet ﷺ, and he saw how it grieved Abdullah ibn Jahsh, he turned to him with words of comfort that reframed the whole loss. He asked him, in essence: are you not pleased that Allah will give you a home in Paradise in place of the home that was taken from you? It is a question that hangs over this entire family. A house of stone and clay in Makkah, seized by an enemy, exchanged for a house in the Gardens that no one can ever take. The Prophet ﷺ was teaching them how to count. What looked like theft, from the streets of

Makkah, was a transaction Allah had already settled in their favour.

But for Abu Ahmad, there was a particular sting in it, a wound the others did not carry in quite the same way. The man who took his house, who sold it and everything in it and pocketed the money, was his own father-in-law. It was Abu Sufyan who stripped Abu Ahmad's home and kept the proceeds. The father of his wife. The grandfather, in time, of his children. And this, the histories tell us, troubled Abu Ahmad for the rest of his life. Not because he could not let go of property, but because of who had done it, and how close it had come.

Excused from the battlefield, equal in reward

Years passed. The persecution gave way to the hijra to Madinah, and Abu Ahmad moved there with the believers. He settled into the new life of the Muslim community, but there was one thing he could not do: he could not go out to fight.

The battles that would define this generation, Badr and Uhud and the rest, were not open to him. His blindness kept him from the lines. And here his story touches one of the gentlest things in the Qur'an. When the verses came that excused the disabled from the duty of fighting, lifting the blame from those who physically could not march out, the commentators connect them to the blind companions of that time. Some of the books of tafsir mention that this concerned both Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum and Abu Ahmad ibn Jahsh: two men who longed to give and could not give in the way the others did, and whom Allah Himself excused.

the blind, the lame, and the sick will not be blamed.' God will admit anyone who obeys Him and His Messenger to

Gardens graced with flowing streams; He will painfully punish anyone who turns away.

QUR'AN 48:17

Read that verse slowly, because it does two things at once, and the second is the mercy that should move us. First it lifts the blame: the blind, the lame, the sick are not held to account for what their bodies cannot do. But it does not stop there. In the very same breath it speaks of admission to Gardens for whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger. The door of fighting was closed to Abu Ahmad, but the door of reward was not. He could not raise a sword, but he could obey, he could believe, he could give of his heart what others gave of their limbs. And the reward of the Gardens was named for the obedient, not only for the warriors.

This is the secret at the centre of his life. Allah never required of Abu Ahmad what Abu Ahmad could not do. He was excused for what was beyond him and rewarded for what was within him. A man who, by the world's accounting, was sidelined from every great event of his age, was promised by his Lord the same destination as those who rode into battle.

The brother who outlived them all

There is a tenderness in how Allah arranged the end of this family, and it centres on Abu Ahmad.

Of all the children of Jahsh, the strong and the celebrated, it was the blind brother who outlived them. Ubaydullah ibn Jahsh had died in Abyssinia. Abdullah ibn Jahsh, the first commander, fell as a martyr. One by one, the siblings went ahead. And Abu Ahmad, the one who might have seemed the most fragile, the one most in need of others, remained. He buried them. The man the world

would have expected to lean on his family for support became the last of them standing.

And in that long life, Allah gave him honours he could not have earned on any battlefield. When his sister Zaynab bint Jahsh was married to the Prophet ﷺ, it was Abu Ahmad who served as her guardian, the wali who gave her in marriage to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Picture the blind brother, once robbed and exiled and sidelined, now standing in the most blessed marriage of his family's history, his hand joining his sister to the Prophet ﷺ himself. The man excused from the front lines was placed at the very heart of his family's greatest honour.

When the Muslims returned in triumph to Makkah, in the conquest, Abu Ahmad came back too, to the city he had loved and walked without a guide, the city that had stolen his home. And here the old wound surfaced one more time, in a scene that is painful precisely because it is so human.

By then Abu Sufyan had accepted Islam and been granted amnesty. The past was meant to be the past. But standing again before the Kaaba, in the city of his roots, the grief over his stolen home rose up in Abu Ahmad and would not be silent. He cried out, imploring the people by Allah, calling on Banu Abd Manaf, reminding them of the old bonds of allegiance and of the home that had been taken from him. He composed long lines about Abu Sufyan and the property that had been seized, the regret that should have been felt. He stood there, a blind man at the heart of the holy city, calling out for a justice that the years had buried.

The Prophet ﷺ went to him. He spoke to Abu Ahmad, gently, and brought him down from his camel, and Abu Ahmad sat with the people. And from that day, the histories say, no one heard him speak of that house again until he met Allah. We are not told the

exact words the Prophet ﷺ used, but we are told their effect: the wound was finally quieted. Abu Ahmad was given to understand that this matter was old, that it had been dealt with, and that his true compensation was not a house in Makkah at all. It was with Allah. After a lifetime of carrying that grievance, he laid it down at the word of the Prophet ﷺ, and he laid it down for good.

Carrying his sister to the grave

The last scene we have of Abu Ahmad is one of the most moving in this whole family's story, and it took place in the time of the Caliphate of Umar.

He outlived even Zaynab bint Jahsh, his sister, the mother of the believers. When she died and her body was carried out for burial, the people pressed in around her bier, each wanting the honour of bearing the wife of the Prophet ﷺ to her resting place. And there in the crowd was Abu Ahmad, the blind brother, insisting that he be one of those who carried her.

They tried to relieve him of it. They wanted to spare him, to lift the burden of carrying his own sister's body to the grave. But he would not let go. He held on to her bier and refused to be parted from it. And he said something that tells you what his faith had taught him to see, even without his eyes. This, he said, is the woman through whom we obtained every blessing, the barakah that came to our family through her marriage to the Prophet ﷺ. That honour, he meant, is what comforts us in the pain of losing her.

So they let him. The blind brother helped carry the mother of the believers to her grave, and he was among those who lowered her into the earth. He had been the wali who gave her to the Prophet ﷺ in marriage; now he was among those who returned her to her

Lord. From the marriage to the burial, this family's greatest honour passed through the hands of the brother the world had counted as the weakest.

Abu Ahmad died some time after that. We do not know the circumstances of his death. But we know how he lived: excused by Allah from what he could not do, honoured with what no battlefield could give, and faithful to the end.

What Abu Ahmad's life asks of our faith

It is easy to admire a man like Abu Ahmad and leave it there, to be impressed that a blind man could walk the mountains and outlive his family and carry a mother of the believers to her grave. But admiration is not what his life is for. His life is a question put to our own iman, and the question is this: do you believe that Allah measures you the way He actually does, and not the way the world does?

Because the world had Abu Ahmad figured out. A blind man. Robbed. Excused from every great expedition. Sidelined while his brother led armies and his sisters made history. By every external measure, he was the least of his remarkable family. And yet Allah excused him from what he could not do, rewarded him for what he could, gave him the Gardens alongside the warriors, and placed him at the centre of his family's two most sacred moments. The lesson is not that Abu Ahmad overcame his limitation. The lesson is that with Allah, the limitation was never the point. Your worth to your Lord is not in what you cannot do; it is in the heart you bring to what you can.

This should reach anyone who has ever felt small in the scale of things, anyone who looks at the great deeds of others and feels they have nothing comparable to offer. You may not be the one

who leads. You may be the one who is sick, or limited, or quietly excused from the work that earns the world's applause. Abu Ahmad tells you that Allah has not forgotten you, that the verse which lifts the blame also opens the Gardens, and that the obedience of a constrained servant weighs with Allah exactly as heavily as the striving of the free and the strong. Do for Allah what is genuinely within your reach, fully and sincerely, and leave the rest to His mercy, which is wider than any battlefield.

And then there is the matter of the house. Abu Ahmad carried a real injustice for most of his life. The hurt was legitimate; his own father-in-law had robbed him. But the Prophet ﷺ kept teaching this family one thing: stop counting in the currency of this world. A home in Makkah for a home in Paradise. A loss that the enemy meant for harm, recorded by Allah as a debt He Himself would settle. When Abu Ahmad finally fell silent about that house, it was not because the injustice had been repaid in coin. It was because he had at last accepted that his compensation was with Allah, and that this was enough. Ask whether you can do the same with the wound you are nursing. Some of what has been taken from you will never be returned in this life. The believer's freedom is to hand the account to Allah, to trust that nothing given up for His sake is ever truly lost, and to stop letting an old grievance own the years you have left.

So take something small and concrete from this blind companion into your own ordinary life. The next time you feel that what you have to offer is too little to matter, give it anyway, for Allah, and refuse to believe the world's accounting of your worth. The next time an old hurt rises up and demands that you keep score, hand the matter to your Lord and let it go, the way Abu Ahmad let go of his house. And when you see someone the community has quietly counted as the least, the limited one, the one who cannot

keep up, remember that Allah may have placed honours on that person that the strong will never touch. May Allah be pleased with Abu Ahmad ibn Jahsh, who walked without a guide and was guided most of all, and may He teach us to measure ourselves by His mercy and not by the eyes of people.

This chapter follows the account of Abu Ahmad Abd ibn Jahsh (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (48:17). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abdullah ibn Jahsh

The First Commander, and the Honest Prayer

There is a kind of believer who does not leave behind a long record. We do not have a thick file of his words, his rulings, his years of leadership. What we have of Abdullah ibn Jahsh (may Allah be pleased with him) is a handful of moments, and yet each one of them lands like a stone dropped into still water, sending out rings that touch the heart for a long time afterward. He was the first man in Islam to be called a commander. He carried a sealed letter into the desert and obeyed it before he understood it. And on the morning of his death, he stood with his hands raised and asked Allah for something so daring, so honest, that the companion praying beside him said plainly: his prayer was better than mine.

To understand him, you have to begin with the house he was born into, because Islam had already begun to seep into its walls before the message ever reached it.

A household that was already searching

Abdullah was the son of Jahsh ibn Ri'ab al-Asadi, a man who was an ally of Banu Abd Shams, one of the clans of Quraysh. His mother was Umaymah bint Abd al-Muttalib, and that name changes everything, because she was the daughter of Abd al-Muttalib and therefore the paternal aunt of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Abdullah was not only an early Muslim. He was

the Prophet's own cousin, bound to him by blood before he was bound to him by faith.

His mother, the biographers say, passed away before her children embraced Islam. But every one of those children would become Muslim, and the list of them reads like a roll of honor. His sister Hamnah bint Jahsh would become the widow of Mus'ab ibn Umayr, and her grief at Uhud is one of the most moving scenes the seerah preserves. His sister Zaynab bint Jahsh would, in time, become a wife of the Prophet ﷺ, a Mother of the Believers. His brother Ubaydullah ibn Jahsh has his own complicated story, a man who had reached toward monotheism even before the Prophet ﷺ began to preach, searching for the truth in a city full of idols. And another brother, Abu Ahmad ibn Jahsh, carried a story of his own that the histories remember.

So picture the household. Before Islam was a public call, before there were crowds and battles and migrations, there was a family in Makkah in which the old gods had already begun to lose their grip, in which hearts were quietly turning toward the One. When the message came, this was soil that had already been turned over. Abdullah did not have far to walk to reach the truth, because the truth had been drawing near to his home for years.

The early yes

He said yes early. Abdullah ibn Jahsh embraced Islam at the hands of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him), and this detail is worth pausing on, because it tells you something about how faith multiplies. Abu Bakr did not simply believe. He carried others to belief, and every good deed that flowed from the people he guided was written, by the mercy of Allah, into his own account as well. When you read the life of Abdullah ibn Jahsh, you are also reading a chapter of the reward of Abu Bakr.

One sincere man who opens a door for another does not lose anything of his own; he gains everything the other person becomes.

Abdullah joined the small, hunted community that gathered in the house of al-Arqam, the secret school where the first Muslims learned their religion under the shadow of persecution. When the pressure in Makkah grew unbearable, he was among those who made the second migration to Abyssinia, leaving home and safety to keep his faith intact. And later he made the journey again, this time to Madinah. He is therefore counted among a distinguished few: the people of the two migrations, those who left everything not once but twice for the sake of Allah. A man does not uproot his entire life two separate times for a cause he half believes in. Every migration was a vote cast with his whole body that this religion was worth more than the city of his birth.

The first to be called a commander

After he reached Madinah, the Prophet ﷺ sent Abdullah ibn Jahsh out at the head of a small expedition, and from that mission comes one of the firsts that history attached to his name. The companion who reported it is Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas (may Allah be pleased with him), a man who, you will notice, seems to be standing nearby for almost every important moment in this story.

Sa'd narrated that the Prophet ﷺ sent them out and said that he would place over them a man who was the most patient of them with hunger and thirst. Think about that as a measure of leadership. Not the strongest, not the loudest, not the one with the most followers, but the one who could endure want without breaking, who could go without food and water and still keep his composure and keep his men together. By that standard the

Prophet ﷺ appointed Abdullah ibn Jahsh, and so, as Sa'd put it, he was the first commander in Islam.

We know, of course, that the title Amir al-Mu'minin, the Commander of the Believers, would later belong as an office to Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him). But the seed of it, the very first time a believer was formally placed in command of other believers under the banner of this faith, was here, with a quiet, patient man on the edge of the desert.

The sealed letter and the raid at Nakhlah

The mission itself became famous, and it became famous because it went wrong before it could go right.

In the period before the Battle of Badr, the Prophet ﷺ used to send out small parties to track and disrupt the caravans of Quraysh. These were not random raids. The Makkans had seized the wealth and property of the Muslims they had driven out, and they were carrying those stolen goods north to trade them in Greater Syria. The expeditions were a way of pressing on that wound, of disrupting the commerce that was being built on what had been taken by force.

The Prophet ﷺ gave Abdullah a written letter of instructions, and he gave him a strange command alongside it: do not open this letter until you have traveled for two days. Abdullah obeyed. He did not break the seal early, did not peek, did not reason that as commander he had the right to know his orders sooner. He waited. When he finally opened it, he found that he was being sent toward Nakhlah, a place between Makkah and Ta'if, to watch the movements of Quraysh and to bring back word of their caravan. The instruction was to observe and to gather

intelligence, not to fight, because this was the month of Rajab, one of the sacred months in which fighting was forbidden.

Here is the heart of the matter. The Makkans themselves did not honor the sacred months. They were a people who would shift the calendar around, sliding the sacred months back and forth to suit their convenience, so that they could fight when it pleased them and call it lawful. But the Prophet ﷺ honored what Allah had made sacred, even when his enemies did not. The sanctity of the month did not depend on whether the other side respected it. It depended on Allah.

At Nakhlah, the party found the caravan, and despite the instruction, fighting broke out. When it was over, the men returned to Madinah not only with the captured merchandise but with one man of Quraysh killed and two taken prisoner. And when they came back, the Prophet ﷺ did not greet them with congratulations. He disapproved of what they had done. He said clearly that he had not commanded them to fight in the sacred month, only to gather news and watch the caravan.

Put yourself in Abdullah's place in that moment. You are the appointed commander. The thing you most feared has happened: you have earned the displeasure of the Prophet ﷺ himself. And worse, the people of Makkah have seized on it. They are spreading the word through the tribes that this man Muhammad ﷺ violated a sacred month, that he sent his people to shed blood in the time Allah had forbidden it. The very people who had persecuted the believers, seized their property, and twisted the calendar for their own wars were now wrapping themselves in the language of sanctity to score a point. It was a low thing to do, and it stung.

The verse that lifted the burden

Abdullah ibn Jahsh waited, saddened, uncertain, hoping for something from his Lord that would settle the matter. And the answer came, not from the Prophet ﷺ as a man, but from above the seven heavens. Allah revealed Qur'an about exactly this situation:

They ask you [Prophet] about fighting in the prohibited month. Say, 'Fighting in that month is a great offence, but to bar others from God's path, to disbelieve in Him, prevent access to the Sacred Mosque, and expel its people, are still greater offences in God's eyes: persecution is worse than killing.' They will not stop fighting you [believers] until they make you revoke your faith, if they can. If any of you revoke your faith and die as disbelievers, your deeds will come to nothing in this world and the Hereafter, and you will be inhabitants of the Fire, there to remain.

QUR'AN 2:217

See what this verse does. It does not pretend that fighting in the sacred month is nothing; it calls it a great offence. But then it turns the accusation completely around. You people of Makkah, it says, are in no position to claim the moral high ground. You barred people from the path of Allah. You blocked access to the Sacred Mosque. You drove the believers out of their own homes. You are guilty of persecution, and persecution is worse than killing. The small group at Nakhlah was not the source of the great wrong here. The great wrong belonged to those who had uprooted an entire community and were now trading its stolen wealth while complaining about a single month.

The revelation lifted the burden off Abdullah ibn Jahsh and off the believers with him. It was a public, eternal declaration that the weight of guilt did not sit on their shoulders. Imagine carrying

that kind of relief: to have feared you had failed, and then to hear that Allah Himself had taken your side and put the matter right in words that would be recited until the end of time.

Uhud, and a prayer too honest to forget

Abdullah ibn Jahsh fought at Badr, and he fought bravely, earning his place among the veterans of that decisive day. But the moment that defines him, the moment that ought to stay with anyone who hears it, came at Uhud.

Once again the witness is Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, and once again may Allah be pleased with him for preserving these scenes. Before the battle began, Abdullah ibn Jahsh turned to Sa'd and said, Will you not make du'a to Allah? So the two of them stepped aside, and they raised their hands together. Picture it: two companions, side by side, on the edge of a battle that would test the entire community, lifting their palms to the sky.

Sa'd prayed first. He asked Allah to send him a strong opponent, fierce in fighting, that he would fight him and be killed by him, and that Allah would grant him martyrdom. A worthy prayer, the prayer of a brave man. And Abdullah said ameen to it.

Then Abdullah ibn Jahsh raised his own request, and it went somewhere else entirely. He asked Allah to send him a strong, fierce opponent. He asked that he would fight him for the sake of Allah and that the man would kill him, and then mutilate his body, cutting off his nose and his ears. And then he said the words that make this prayer unforgettable. He said: so that when I meet You tomorrow, O Allah, You will ask me, In whose cause were your nose and ears cut off? And I will say, For Your sake and for the sake of Your Messenger. And You will say to me, You have spoken the truth.

Sit with what that prayer required. He was not asking for an easy martyrdom. He was asking to be wounded in the most disfiguring, humiliating way a man could be wounded in that culture, and he wanted it precisely so that he could stand before his Lord on the Day of Judgment carrying the proof of his sincerity on his own ruined face. He wanted Allah to ask him the question, because he was certain of his answer. He had so much confidence in his own devotion, and so much confidence that Allah would accept it, that he asked to be made into a walking testimony of love. Sa'd, listening beside him, said afterward without any hesitation: the prayer of Abdullah was better than my prayer.

And Allah answered it, every part of it. Abdullah ibn Jahsh fought until he was killed by a man named al-Ahmas ibn Shariq, a hated enemy of the Prophet ﷺ, the man about whom the scholars say the opening of Surah al-Humazah was revealed:

Woe to every fault-finding backbiter

QUR'AN 104:1

That same man did to Abdullah exactly what had been done to Hamza on that field. He mutilated him, cutting off his nose and his ears, making an example of his body. The very thing Abdullah had asked for in his prayer was the very thing that befell him. His sincere request was granted down to its painful detail.

One grave with the Lion of Allah

When the Prophet ﷺ came upon him on the battlefield, he was deeply moved. And he gave an order that says everything about the rank of this man. He ordered that Abdullah ibn Jahsh be buried in the same grave as Hamza ibn Abd al-Muttalib, the Lion

of Allah, the Prophet's beloved uncle. The two were kin: Hamza was the brother of Abdullah's own mother, Umaymah. They had died in the same way, mutilated for the sake of Allah, and now they would lie together in one grave on the slope of Uhud.

To this day, when the visitor goes to Uhud and stands at the grave of Hamza, which is set apart from the others, that visitor stands also at the grave of Abdullah ibn Jahsh, the two of them resting side by side, two men who gave their bodies for the cause of Allah and were not separated even in the earth. He left behind a widow, Zaynab bint Khuzaymah, who would herself go on to become a Mother of the Believers, known for her mercy to the poor.

He did not live to see the religion triumph. He did not gather years of stories the way some of the long-lived companions did. He gave an early yes, two migrations, a moment of patient command, an honest waiting for his Lord's verdict, and a prayer at Uhud that cost him his life and won him exactly what he had asked for. It was enough. It was more than enough.

What Abdullah's life asks of our faith

It is easy to admire a man like this from a safe distance and to assume his story has nothing to do with an ordinary life lived far from any battlefield. That would be a mistake. The things that made Abdullah ibn Jahsh who he was are not relics of the seventh century. They are still being asked of us, in quieter forms, every day.

Start with the sealed letter. The Prophet ﷺ handed him orders he was not permitted to read for two days, and he obeyed before he understood. Most of us want the reasons first. We will trust Allah's command once it makes sense to us, once we can see

where it leads, once the wisdom is clear. Abdullah trusted before the seal was even broken. That is the posture of real faith: to submit to what Allah has commanded because He commanded it, not because we have personally audited the wisdom and approved it. There are things in your own religion you have been told to do and to leave, and the question his life puts to you is whether you obey them like a man reading a letter he already understands, or like a man who trusts the One who wrote it.

Then there is the matter of the sacred month. The Makkans did not honor it, so it would have been easy to say that the rules no longer applied, that sanctity is only worth keeping when everyone else keeps it. The Prophet ﷺ honored what Allah had made sacred precisely when his enemies did not. This is a test you face constantly. The standards of honesty, of modesty, of fairness, of restraint do not dissolve just because the people around you have abandoned them. What Allah has made sacred stays sacred whether or not the world agrees. Holding to it when everyone else has let go is not naivety. It is taqwa.

But the deepest thing in his life is that prayer at Uhud, and it is really a lesson in ikhlas, in sincerity, the thing that decides whether any deed is accepted at all. Abdullah did not ask for a comfortable martyrdom that would look good to others. He asked to be disfigured for the sake of Allah, wanting nothing from it except that his Lord would know the truth of his heart and confirm it on the Day of Judgment. His eye was fixed entirely on the meeting with Allah, on hearing Allah say to him, You have spoken the truth. Ask yourself honestly how many of your good deeds are aimed there, at that meeting, at that single word of acceptance from your Lord, and how many are quietly performed for the eyes of people who will forget them within the hour. The companion next to him recognized at once that his prayer was

better, and the difference was not eloquence. It was the depth of his sincerity and the strength of his certainty in Allah.

So take something from him into a life that has no battlefield in it. You may never be asked to give your body, but you are asked, today, to give your intentions. Do one act of worship this week that no one will ever see, and mean it only for Allah. When you are commanded to leave something off, leave it off the way he obeyed the sealed letter, before you have finished arguing yourself into the wisdom of it. And when you raise your hands to make du'a, do not ask only for ease. Ask, as he did, that whatever befalls you might one day be the very thing that lets you stand before Allah and say, This was for You, and hear Him answer that you have spoken the truth. That is a prayer still open to anyone bold enough and sincere enough to make it. May Allah be pleased with Abdullah ibn Jahsh, who gave his early yes and his honest prayer, and may He let us share even a small measure of his sincerity, and gather us with him and with the martyrs of Uhud in the gardens of al-Firdaws.

This chapter follows the account of Abdullah ibn Jahsh (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2:217, 104:1). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Shurahbil ibn Hasana

The Scribe and the Commander

There are companions whose lives fill many pages, whose every word and battle has been preserved and turned over by the scholars for centuries. And there are others, just as beloved to Allah, about whom the histories say almost nothing before a certain moment, then suddenly entrust them with something enormous. Shurahbil ibn Hasana (may Allah be pleased with him) is one of the second kind. We do not know how many had embraced Islam before him. We do not have the vivid scene of his conversion. What we have is a quiet man who carried the trust of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, wrote down the words of the Qur'an with his own hand, and then opened entire lands to this religion, lands that millions still live in today, still reaping the fruit of what was placed on his hands.

If you want to understand him, you have to understand that the most important work is often done by people whose names are not on the list.

A son named after his mother

Even his name carries a story. He is called Shurahbil ibn Hasana, son of Hasana, and Hasana was his mother. This is unusual among the Arabs, who almost always traced a man through his father. But there is very little known about his father at all. The sources dispute even his name. Some mention a man called

Abdullah ibn al-Muta, and they say Shurahbil came from one of the famous tribes of the time, Kindah or Tamim, though even that is not settled.

What is not in dispute is his mother. Hasana raised him. The scholars say she is the reason he is named after her, because she is the one who took him in and brought him up as a child. And she herself was one of the early Muslims (may Allah be pleased with her), so she belongs to that first generation of believers alongside her son. Later in life she would marry a man named Sufyan ibn Mamar (may Allah be pleased with him) from Madinah, and he and his sons accepted Islam too. Those sons, Jabir and Junada, became the stepbrothers of Shurahbil, and the whole household would one day make the second migration to Abyssinia together.

So before he ever held a pen or a banner, Shurahbil belonged to a small, devout family that had nothing to gain in this world by following the Prophet ﷺ and everything to lose. They were among the believers when belief was dangerous and brought no comfort. That is the soil he grew in.

The crossing to Abyssinia

Like several of these quiet early companions, Shurahbil first comes into clear view at the migration to Abyssinia. When the persecution in Makkah grew unbearable, the Prophet ﷺ sent a group of believers across the sea to the land of the Negus, the just Christian king who would shelter them. Shurahbil made that second Hijra, and he did not make it alone. His mother went with him. His stepfather went. His stepbrothers went. A whole family pulled up its roots and crossed the water for the sake of Allah.

This is a detail worth pausing on. We sometimes imagine the migration to Abyssinia as a handful of brave individuals slipping away. But here is an entire household leaving together, the old and the young, the way a family leaves a burning house, carrying only their faith. They settled in that far country and stayed there for years. They were not part of the group that returned to Makkah and then made the famous migration to Madinah with the Prophet ﷺ. They were part of the community that remained behind in Abyssinia, holding onto the religion in a foreign land, waiting.

It is in exile, far from the Prophet ﷺ, that Shurahbil is first given a trust that tells you exactly how he was seen.

The man entrusted to bring home a mother of the believers

Among the believers in Abyssinia was a woman whose situation had become very delicate. Her name was Umm Habiba (may Allah be pleased with her), and she was the daughter of Abu Sufyan, who at that time was among the fiercest enemies of Islam in Makkah. She had migrated to Abyssinia with her husband, and there her husband had left the faith and died, leaving her a widow, alone, the daughter of the enemy, stranded in a distant country.

Then something extraordinary happened. The Prophet ﷺ, all the way from Madinah, sent a proposal of marriage to this widow in Abyssinia. The Negus himself conducted the marriage on the Prophet's behalf and gave a generous dowry of four thousand dirhams from his own wealth, and he held the wedding feast for her there in his own land. So the marriage was contracted, but the husband and wife were separated by a sea and many years. Umm Habiba still had to be brought home to the Prophet ﷺ.

The man chosen to bring her was Shurahbil ibn Hasana. According to Umm Habiba's own account, the Negus sent her in the company of Shurahbil, and it was he who accompanied her from Abyssinia all the way to Madinah, to be united at last with the Prophet ﷺ. Think about what kind of man is given that task. To escort a mother of the believers, the wife of the Prophet ﷺ and the daughter of Abu Sufyan, across a sea and a desert, safely into the presence of the Messenger of Allah, is not a trust given to just anyone. It is given to someone known for competence, for trustworthiness, for an honor and reliability that the Prophet ﷺ recognized. Shurahbil carried that trust and delivered it. And that, it turns out, was only the smaller of the two honors that awaited him.

The hand that wrote the revelation

When Shurahbil arrived in Madinah with the rest of that returning community, the Prophet ﷺ gave him a place that almost no one is given. He made him one of the scribes of the revelation, one of those entrusted to write down the Qur'an as it came.

To grasp the weight of this, remember what the Qur'an is to the believer: the literal speech of Allah, sent down upon the heart of the Prophet ﷺ. In a society where very few people could read or write, the words had to be captured, recorded, fixed in writing so they would never be lost. Only a small circle of trusted, literate companions did this work. Shurahbil was one of them. He could read and write, he had already proven his faith and his sacrifice over years of exile, and so he was found deserving of being among the hands that recorded the words of his Lord.

Sit with that for a moment. The Qur'an you hold today, the words you recite in your prayer, some of their earliest written record passed through the fingers of this man whom most Muslims have

never heard of. He did not fight in most of the great battles. He was not at the center of the famous stories. But when Allah's own words needed to be written down and preserved for every generation that would ever come, Shurahbil ibn Hasana was trusted to hold the pen. Some of the most important work in the history of this ummah was done quietly, by a man content to be unknown.

From the pen to the banner

When the Prophet ﷺ passed away and Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) became the first caliph, the young Muslim state faced a wave of rebellion and apostasy. Abu Bakr called on his most capable men, and the same Shurahbil who had been a scribe now proved he was also a soldier. In the decisive Battle of Yamama against the false prophet and his followers, Shurahbil served as second in command beneath Khalid ibn al-Walid (may Allah be pleased with him), and he was known for running special operations because of a unique skill set he carried. The man of the pen had become a man of strategy.

After Yamama, Abu Bakr turned the strength of the Muslims outward, toward the great empire on their northern border. He sent four divisions of the army into Syria under the overall command of Khalid ibn al-Walid (may Allah be pleased with him), each division under its own commander. One was led by Amr ibn al-As, one by Abu Ubaidah ibn al-Jarrah, one by Yazid ibn Abi Sufyan, and one by Shurahbil ibn Hasana (may Allah be pleased with them all). So this quiet companion now stood among the chief commanders of the campaign against the Byzantines.

He did not stand there as a figurehead. He was a key participant in the fall of Busra, an important city of greater Syria. He was a commander at the Battle of Ajnadayn, one of the most decisive

clashes against the Byzantines, where the enemy was driven back into Damascus. And when Abu Bakr passed away and Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) replaced Khalid ibn al-Walid with Abu Ubaidah as the supreme commander, something telling happened. Abu Ubaidah, taking charge of the whole army, kept Shurahbil exactly where he was, as his deputy and second in command. A change at the very top, and yet Shurahbil was left in his place, because his worth was beyond question. Read the histories of those campaigns and you will find that you can scarcely turn a page without coming upon the battalion of Shurahbil ibn Hasana.

The land he opened, and the words he left

Where does Shurahbil shine the most? He is credited, above all, with the opening of what is today Jordan, along with parts of Palestine. With an army of around seven thousand men he conquered the majority of that region. So when you think of the believers who live in those lands now, praying and fasting and raising their children upon Islam, this is one of the men on whose hands Allah did so much that its blessings are still being received generations later. He did not live to see most of that fruit. He planted, and others have eaten.

Then came the plague of Amwas, a devastating sickness that swept through the Muslim army in Syria and took many of the greatest companions. In the midst of it, there is a striking exchange recorded between Shurahbil and Amr ibn al-As (may Allah be pleased with them), as Amr searched for a way to escape the plague and spare the people. It was, in a sense, an early disagreement among the Muslims about something we would now call distancing. Reminding Amr of his own long standing in the faith, Shurahbil said that he had been a

companion of the Prophet ﷺ at a time when Amr was still as lost as a stray camel of his people. And Amr did not dispute it. He said, "He has spoken the truth."

Then Shurahbil spoke the words he is remembered for. About the plague that was killing the believers around him, he said that it was the mercy of their Lord, and the supplication of their Prophet ﷺ, and the death of the righteous who had gone before them. He looked at the very thing that was taking the lives of the best of his generation, and he did not see only catastrophe. He saw the decree of Allah, and he submitted to it with a heart at rest.

He did not have to wait long to follow them. Shurahbil ibn Hasana died in that plague of Amwas, on the very same day as Abu Ubaidah ibn al-Jarrah, the supreme commander himself. Imagine an army losing its first and second in command on a single day to a single sickness. He was about sixty-seven years old. It was a life spent in the cause of Allah from beginning to end, a life at the front of one battalion after another, a life that began in the quiet of exile with his mother and ended as a martyr of the plague, his name woven through nearly every chapter of the conquest of Syria.

What Shurahbil's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read about the famous companions, the ones with long chapters and great fame, and feel that holiness belongs to people we could never resemble. Shurahbil ibn Hasana takes that excuse away. Here is a man with almost no recorded backstory, no dramatic conversion scene, no place in the most celebrated battles, and yet he wrote down the Qur'an with his hand, carried a mother of the believers home, and opened lands that still belong to Islam. His life is not a monument to admire from a distance. It is a question put directly to your own iman.

The first thing he asks of you is to be willing to do the work no one will credit to you. Shurahbil was trusted with one of the most consequential tasks in the history of this religion, the writing of the revelation, and most Muslims have never even heard his name. He did not need to be famous to be valuable to Allah. This is the heart of sincerity, of ikhlas: to labor for Allah alone, content that He has seen it, even when no human being ever will. Ask yourself honestly how much of your effort is shaped by who is watching. Then ask whether you could do one good thing this week the way Shurahbil did his greatest work, quietly, without recognition, only for the One who counts it.

The second thing he asks of you is trust in the decree of Allah, especially when it wounds you. When the plague was carrying off the best of his companions, Shurahbil did not rage against it. He called it the mercy of his Lord and the answered prayer of his Prophet ﷺ, and then he died of it himself, on the same day as his commander. That is contentment with the qadar of Allah at its hardest, not as a slogan said in comfort, but as a peace held in the very teeth of loss. Hardship will come to you, and when it does, his life asks whether your trust in Allah is firm enough to survive it, whether you can look at what hurts you and still see the hand of a Lord who is merciful and wise.

And the third thing he asks is patient endurance in a long obedience. Shurahbil migrated, waited in exile, returned, wrote, fought campaign after campaign, and died still serving. There was no single shining moment that made his life, only a steady, lifelong faithfulness that the books summarize in a paragraph but that Allah recorded in full. Most of us are not asked for one heroic act. We are asked for the unglamorous loyalty of years: the prayers prayed when no one sees, the trusts kept, the small

duties carried without applause. Shurahbil shows that this quiet steadiness is itself a kind of greatness in the sight of Allah.

So take one thing from him into your ordinary life. Do one good deed this week that no one will ever know about, and give it to Allah alone. Hold steady through one difficulty without complaint to your Lord, trusting that His decree is better than your preference. Be faithful in something small and unseen, the way he was faithful with a pen and a banner that history almost forgot. That is the path of the quiet companion, and it is still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Shurahbil ibn Hasana, accept his long struggle and his martyrdom, and raise us upon a measure of the sincerity and trust that he carried unseen.

This chapter follows the account of Shurahbil ibn Hasana (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Utbah ibn Ghazwan

The Humble Governor

There is a kind of man whose life leaves almost no paper trail and yet bends the course of history. He fights in the front rank of every battle and narrates not a single hadith. He opens a city that will one day fill the world with scholars, and then begs to be relieved of governing it. He commands armies and prays to be spared command. Utbah ibn Ghazwan (may Allah be pleased with him) was such a man, and what little we have of him is enough to ask a hard question of our own hearts.

He belongs to the last group of companions in this series, the silent soldiers: men entrusted with some of the heaviest missions in Islam, who left behind no circle of students and no body of reported sayings, only a few paragraphs and the long shadow of what they built. Utbah is the first of them. And the first surprise about him is how early he came.

The seventh of seven

By his own account, Utbah was the seventh person to accept Islam. Sit with that for a moment. The most famous of the early believers are counted as the third, the fifth, the sixth to follow the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Here is a man who places himself the seventh, and even if the exact order is hard to fix in those first secret days, he is without question among the first ten or fifteen souls on the earth to say yes to this religion. That is not a

footnote. That is a man who believed when belief was a whisper in a hostile city, when there was no community to belong to and no victory in sight.

He was the son of Ghazwan, from a small tribe called Banu Mazin, a tribe related to Quraysh but not counted among them. In the social order of Makkah he was what the Arabs called a halif, a man who had pledged his allegiance to a larger tribe and was, by that pledge, treated as one of its own. The Prophet ﷺ himself affirmed this principle: the ally of a people is one of them. Utbah's allegiance was to Banu Nawfal, a famous clan of Quraysh. So he stood at the edge of Makkah's power, near it but not of it, an outsider folded into the great machinery of the city.

He was a striking man. The histories describe him as tall and handsome, physically strong, with large eyes and a face that seemed to carry light. He spoke with command. He had what we might call presence, the sort of bearing that draws eyes in a crowd and steadies men on a battlefield. He was about ten years younger than the Prophet ﷺ, which would place him near thirty when he embraced Islam.

We know almost nothing of his early years, and there is a reason for that silence. Utbah was a man whose biography speaks through the battlefield, and in those first Makkan years there were no battles to fight, only persecution to endure. So he endured it. He made the hijra to Abyssinia, not once but as part of those two migrations, and then he made the hijra to Madinah when the door finally opened. Three migrations in all, twice across the sea and once across the desert, each one a quiet act of leaving everything for the sake of a promise he could not yet see fulfilled.

Faith woven through a family

What we do know of his household tells us he did not walk this road alone. Both of his sisters accepted Islam alongside him, and through them his life became braided into the lives of some of the greatest names of this ummah. One sister would in time marry Uthman ibn Affan, making Utbah the brother-in-law of the man who would become the third caliph. His youngest sister would marry Abu Hurayrah, the companion who carried more of the Prophet's words to the world than almost anyone.

Think of what that means. This obscure soldier, of whom we have so little, sat at the same family table as a caliph and as the greatest narrator of hadith. The currents of his life ran close to the center of everything, and yet he never reached for the spotlight. He let his sisters' marriages, his own conversions, his migrations all happen without leaving us a word of self-regard. The light was always on others. He simply stood in it without claiming it.

When he reached Madinah, the Prophet ﷺ paired him, in the bond of brotherhood between the Emigrants and the Helpers, with Abu Dujana, the famous warrior of the Ansar. Those pairings were not random. The Prophet ﷺ matched men by temperament and strength, and to be joined with Abu Dujana, the man who wore the red headband into battle and fought beneath the Prophet's own sword, tells you exactly what kind of man Utbah was. He was cut from the same cloth: brave, forward, formidable in the fight.

And fight he did. He was a veteran of Badr and a veteran of Uhud. He stood at the trench of Khandaq. He was present at the battles alongside the Prophet ﷺ, and the Prophet ﷺ would single him out for special raids that called for particular expertise.

After the Prophet's passing he fought in the wars against the apostate tribes under Abu Bakr as-Siddiq. Across all of it, there is not a single recorded incident between him and the Prophet ﷺ, not one personal exchange preserved for us. He was simply there, in the danger, in the front, year after year, a presence that gathered other men around him whenever the swords came out.

The city that vision opened

His most famous chapter came under the caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab, and that itself is a pattern worth noticing. As the conquests spread Islam into Persia and beyond, men who had lived their whole lives in quiet finally stepped into the light of history, because the world had grown large enough to hold their deeds.

Umar dispatched Utbah against the Persian Empire with a small force, somewhere between three hundred and two thousand men, most of them from his own tribe of Banu Mazin, men known for severity and courage in battle. It was not a great army. But it was an experienced one, and Utbah led it to enormous gains against an empire that had ruled for centuries. He reached a city that was a strategic stronghold of the Persians, a key point of their power, and he wrote to Umar for permission to take it. Umar gave it. And with that small battalion, Utbah conquered the place.

That city was Basra.

It is hard to overstate what this opening would come to mean. Iraq would be known by its two great cities, Basra and Kufa, the twin pillars of the eastern world of Islam. From Basra would pour forth generations of scholarship, schools of grammar and hadith and law, a civilization of learning that shaped the ummah for centuries. Some of the historians note that the name Basra itself

is linked to the word basar, which means vision and eyesight, because the location was so commanding that from it a man could survey the whole of Iraq. It was a place of vision in every sense. And Allah opened it on the hands of Utbah ibn Ghazwan.

Umar appointed him governor of the city he had conquered. For six months, Utbah ibn Ghazwan held one of the most important posts in the expanding state. And it was precisely here, at the summit of worldly success, that the truth of the man finally showed itself.

A tent among the palaces

As the conquest settled and the dunya began to flow, Utbah watched the change come over the people around him. The spoils of war fell into the hands of his men. Suddenly there were large homes rising where there had been a camp. Suddenly there was wealth, comfort, the soft furniture of victory. And the conqueror, the governor, the man who had every right to the finest of it, was uncomfortable.

So Utbah did something that should stop us where we stand. He did not build himself a home. He did not move into one of the palaces the defeated Persians had left behind. The governor of Basra pitched a tent and lived in it, while the men beneath him took the houses. Picture the scene. The highest authority in a strategic city, the one to whom the spoils most belonged, sleeping under cloth while others slept under roofs. He had not come for any of this. He had come to fight for the sake of Allah, and the wealth that frightened other men into building palaces only made him want to live more simply.

It is from this season that we have the one narration preserved from his own mouth, the only real glimpse of his voice that

history hands us. It is recorded in Sahih Muslim, in the Book of Zuhd, the book of asceticism and the softening of hearts. Utbah stood and delivered a sermon to the people of Basra, and in it he turned not to his rank but to his memory of how the beginning had felt.

He told them that he had found himself the seventh of seven who were with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in those first days, and that the only food they had was the leaves of a wild tree, until their gums were torn and ruptured from eating it. The scholars say he was recalling the years of the boycott, when the Prophet's clan was herded into a barren valley and cut off from food, and the believers chewed leaves to survive. This was the man now governing one of the richest cities of the conquests, reminding his people, and himself, where he had come from. He went on, in the histories, to recall that there was a time when he and Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas had only a single garment between the two of them to share. And the weight of that memory is sharpened by where the two men now stood: Sa'd was the governor of Kufa, Utbah the governor of Basra, the two of them holding the two great cities of Iraq between them, the same two men who had once owned one cloak.

Then he said the line that is the whole of him in a single breath. He said that he sought refuge in Allah from being great in his own eyes and small in the sight of Allah. He did not fear poverty. He feared that the world would inflate him until he shrank before his Lord. That is a fear almost no one carries anymore, and it was the governing fear of his life.

The prayer to be made small again

Utbah was a field commander to the bone. He was at home in hardship, in the saddle, in the danger of the front rank, where life

was harsh and clear and entirely for the sake of Allah. He had no taste for the distribution of wealth, no appetite for sitting in authority over a settled city. He wanted to keep fighting. But he had been appointed by Umar, and a man cannot simply abandon a post the caliph has given him. So the next year, he asked permission to travel to Madinah, and when he reached Umar he begged to be relieved of the governorship.

What passed between them is one of the most striking exchanges in the whole story. Utbah did not want the position. Umar would not let it go so easily. The caliph told him plainly that he would not be left as the only one carrying such a burden: none of the companions of the Prophet ﷺ loved these posts of leadership and prestige, but they were a trust from Allah, and the trust had to be borne. Utbah even tried to lean on his own precedence in Islam, the fact that he had embraced the faith long before Umar, as a reason to be excused. Umar would not move. Your seniority in faith, he told him in effect, takes nothing away from your standing, but the post is yours and you must return to it.

Reflect on what is happening here, against everything we know of how power works. We live in a world where men kill for office, where the pursuit of authority corrupts and the holding of it harder still, where positions of leadership are seized and clung to and fought over. Here are two of the best of this ummah, and one is begging to put a governorship down while the other refuses out of fairness, not greed. Neither of them wanted it. Both of them treated it as a weight, not a prize.

When Umar would not release him, Utbah mounted his camel to return to Iraq, and as he sat in the saddle he lifted his hands and made a single, quiet prayer. O Allah, do not return me to it. O

Allah, do not bring me back to that post. A lifetime of striving in the path of Allah had taught him to fear comfort and authority more than he feared anything an enemy could do to him, and so he asked his Lord to take it from him.

Allah answered his prayer.

Utbah ibn Ghazwan, the commander who had stood against great armies and was so often outnumbered and never broken, the man who could control beasts in the chaos of war and direct the movements of whole battalions, died on the road home to Iraq by falling from his camel. Of all the deaths that might have found him, a man of his strength and skill in the saddle, Allah decreed that he would slip from his mount on a quiet journey and pass from this world. He had asked not to be returned to the governorship, and he was not. He never reached Basra again. May Allah accept him.

What Utbah's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel only a distant respect, to admire the soldier and the conqueror and then close the book. That would be to miss what his life is actually asking of us. Utbah ibn Ghazwan was not put before us to be praised. He was put before us as a question about our own iman.

He feared the wrong thing on purpose. The whole world teaches us to fear smallness in the eyes of people: to fear being overlooked, unhoused, unranked, unimportant. Utbah feared the opposite. He sought refuge in Allah from being great in his own eyes and small in the sight of Allah, and he meant it so completely that when honor and comfort came, he ran from them. This is the heart of the matter for us. Ask yourself which smallness you actually dread. Do you lie awake afraid that people

will think less of you, or that Allah will? The answer tells you who you are really living for. Utbah's life asks you to fear only the second kind, and to be at peace, even glad, with the first.

He worked for Allah, not for the eyes of men, and so he had no need to be seen. He fought in every battle and narrated nothing. He sat at the table of caliphs and asked for no portion of their fame. He opened a city that would teach the world and pitched a tent in the middle of it. There is no record of him reminding anyone what he had done, because his deeds were never aimed at people in the first place. This is ikhlas, sincerity, the rarest currency there is: to do the deed for Allah alone and be content that He has seen it. Most of what we do is quietly performed for an audience. Utbah's life asks how much you could do the way he did, in silence, claiming nothing, content that your Lord was watching when no one else was.

He was content with the decree of Allah even when it overturned what he wanted. He did not want the governorship, and rather than scheme his way out of it, he obeyed the caliph and then turned the whole matter over to Allah in a single sincere prayer. When the answer came in a form no one could have wanted, a fall, a sudden death on a lonely road, it was still the answer to his own dua. There is a deep trust in that. He had spent his life believing that Allah arranges what is best, and he died inside that belief, his last recorded act a prayer placed in his Lord's hands. When your own life turns in a direction you did not choose, his story asks whether your trust in Allah is large enough to hold the outcome, even when it does not look like the one you asked for.

And here is what should lift your heart. From the outside, Utbah's life could look like waste: a man of immense ability who left no school, no recorded teaching, who governed a great city for six

months and died falling off a camel. But look again. Allah opened Basra on his hands, and from Basra came a flood of guidance that watered the ummah for a thousand years. We do not know the full measure of what this silent soldier accomplished for the sake of Allah, and that is exactly the point. The good you do for Allah does not need your name on it to count, and it does not need to be visible to you to be real. What you plant quietly for His sake, He grows in ways you may never see in this life.

So carry one thing from him into your ordinary days. Do one good deed this week that no one will ever know was yours, and want it that way. The next time honor or attention comes to you, hold it loosely, and check your heart for the fear that mattered most to Utbah: not that people would see you as small, but that Allah might. Obey what is asked of you, and then place the result in His hands and rest there. That is how the seventh of seven lived, in sincerity, in trust, in a fear that pointed only one direction. May Allah be pleased with Utbah ibn Ghazwan, the humble governor who fled from greatness, and may He grant us a measure of his sincerity and let us inherit something of his dedication to the path of Allah.

This chapter follows the account of Utbah ibn Ghazwan (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). His sermon is recorded in Sahih Muslim, in the Book of Zuhd. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Ayyash ibn Abi Rabiah

The Man of Two Migrations Who Loved His Mother

There is a kind of test that comes wrapped in something good, so that to fail it almost feels like virtue. A man is told his mother is dying, dying because of him, and that she will not eat or drink another mouthful until he comes back to her. What son would not go? And yet going was the door through which years of suffering entered his life. This is the story of a man who loved his mother, who was deceived through that love, who paid for one tender decision with years of chains, and who was carried by Allah, in the end, to a death so honoured that the commander of the army wept over his grave.

His name was Ayyash ibn Abi Rabiah (may Allah be pleased with him), and to understand the strangeness of his life you have to understand the household he came from.

A son of two powers, and a brother of the Pharaoh

Ayyash was born into strength on every side. Through his father he belonged to a powerful clan of Quraysh, and through his mother he was tied to another. He was a cousin of Umar ibn al-Khattab, and he would one day be counted among the men closest to Umar. But there is one fact about his lineage that stops the heart, and the transcript names it plainly: Ayyash was the half-brother of Abu Jahl. The two men shared the same mother.

Sit with that for a moment. One womb carried two sons. One of them became a companion of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, one of the early believers whose names we still repeat with love. The other became, in Dr. Omar Suleiman's words, the Pharaoh of this ummah, the Firaun of this nation, the chief tormentor of the Muslims of Makkah. The same mother, the same house, and two roads that could not have run further apart.

And Ayyash loved his mother. That detail matters, because it is the hinge on which his entire trial turns. His love for her was not a weakness of faith; it was the natural devotion of a good son. It was precisely that goodness his enemies would learn to use against him.

Among the first, and a father in a foreign land

Ayyash embraced Islam very early, shortly after the Prophet ﷺ began calling to the truth from the house of al-Arqam. He was one of the firsts in the truest sense, one of the small band who believed when belief cost everything and promised nothing the world could see.

When the persecution in Makkah grew unbearable, he was among those who made the migration to Abyssinia, though not on the first journey. He went on the second. Some of the scholars of his biography suggest he did not go at first because his standing, his protection from two powerful tribes, meant there was little need; he was shielded in a way the weaker believers were not. But as the pressure rose, even that shelter wore thin, and he made the crossing. He did not go alone. His wife, Asma, made the journey with him, and she too is counted among the firsts. You begin to notice, in these early stories, how often the same handful of names returns: Fatima, Asma, Atika. Asma was one of them, a believer in her own right.

In that distant land their son Abdullah ibn Ayyash was born, a child of the migration, born on foreign soil to two believing parents who had given up home for their faith. That son grew up to narrate the story of his parents, so that what they lived was not lost. There is a quiet mercy in that: a family that left everything still left something behind, a witness who carried their memory forward.

The guilt trip on the road

When the time came for the great migration to Madinah, Ayyash set out with Umar ibn al-Khattab. The two were close, and they travelled together as the believers slipped out of the city toward the Prophet ﷺ.

But Abu Jahl came after them. He was not foolish enough to make a move against Umar; you do not corner Umar. So he turned his attention to his half-brother. With him was another brother, al-Harith ibn Hisham, and now there were three of them together on the road, two of them hunting the third. Abu Jahl spoke the words he knew would land. He told Ayyash that their mother had fallen sick, and that her illness was dragging on, growing worse, because of his Islam. He told him she had sworn an oath: she would not eat, she would not drink, she would not even sit in the shade. She would stay out under the burning Makkan sun and starve herself and let the thirst take her until her son came back to her.

Imagine what that does to the heart of a man who loves his mother. We read these stories and sometimes think, how I wish I could have been a companion. But imagine standing where Ayyash stood, hearing that the woman who raised you is dying in the sun, and that you are the reason. This was the weapon, and it was aimed with terrible precision.

Umar saw it land. He saw his cousin's resolve begin to bend, and he tried to hold him steady. Listen to me, he said. Your mother, when the heat grows fierce and the lice begin to crawl in her hair, she will go inside. And when the hunger truly bites and the thirst truly burns, she will eat and she will drink. Do not go. He warned him again and again. He even offered to take care of everything, to send back whatever needed sending, only do not go back with Abu Jahl, because there was no good in what these men intended.

But Ayyash answered with the words of a faithful son who could not see the trap for the love clouding his eyes. This is my mother, he said. I have to go to her. He was not abandoning his religion; he made that clear. He would go, reassure her, convince her to eat and drink and come in out of the sun, tell her he was well, and then return. He was holding, in his own mind, to a true principle: that Allah commands us to treat our parents with kindness, to be gentle with them in what is good, even as we refuse to obey them in the abandoning of our faith.

Umar remained suspicious of Abu Jahl to the end. If you must go, he said, and I cannot stop you, then take my camel. It was a strong, fast animal, and Umar's reasoning was simple and grim: if they make a move on you, leap onto it and get out as fast as you can. Ayyash took Umar's camel and turned back toward Makkah.

The chains he chose to risk

The plot was already laid. On the way, Abu Jahl and al-Harith found a pretext to get Ayyash down off Umar's swift camel. The moment his feet touched the ground, the moment the speed that might have saved him was gone, the two of them fell on him. They had not dared to touch him in front of Umar, when he was one against their few. Now they could outnumber him, crowd him,

overpower him. They bound him in chains and dragged him back to Makkah a prisoner.

And the persecution that followed was severe. Under that pressure, for a moment, Ayyash relented. The histories are honest about this, and Dr. Suleiman does not hide it. Crushed by torture, he bent. There was a real question hanging over him, a question that must have haunted men in his situation: if I broke under this, if I said the words they forced from me, is there a way back? Is there hope for me?

There is. Some of the scholars of Qur'anic commentary say it was about people in exactly this condition, those forced backward out of their faith under unbearable torment, that Allah revealed words of mercy so wide they can swallow any despair:

Say, '[God says], My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of God's mercy. God forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.

QUR'AN 39:53

Whatever a man may have done, the door is not shut. Ayyash held to his Islam. The lapse was a moment, not a destination, and he remained a believer, but he remained a believer in chains, trapped in Makkah, unable to escape to the Prophet ﷺ in Madinah.

Trapped in Makkah while the Prophet ﷺ prayed for him

Here the story slows into something long and painful. Ayyash was not one of those who slipped away and reached safety. From the day he was captured on the road, he stayed imprisoned in Makkah, under torture, for years. He missed the migration. He

missed Badr. He missed Khandaq. The great events through which his brothers in faith were forged, he watched from the wrong side of the walls, in chains, in the city of his persecutors.

He was not forgotten. Far from it. There is a narration carried by Abu Hurayrah, who heard it from the Prophet ﷺ himself, that in the last part of his prayer the Messenger of Allah ﷺ would raise his hands and call out for the weak and oppressed believers held captive in Makkah, the ones he could not bring to Madinah. He named them. O Allah, save them. O Allah, rescue them. And he prayed against their tormentors, asking Allah to send years of drought upon the people of Makkah, like the drought sent in the days of Yusuf. Three men were remembered in this way, three of the persecuted ones the Prophet ﷺ could not reach, and Ayyash was among them.

Think of what that meant for him, whether he knew it in his cell or not. The Prophet ﷺ was lifting his hands in the night for him by name. Heaven was being asked, prayer after prayer, to break his chains. The drought came as the Prophet ﷺ had asked. And still Ayyash waited, year after year, while a city starved around him and the man he loved most in the world begged Allah to set him free.

This is where Ibn Abbas places another verse. The opening of Surah al-Ankabut, he said, was about this very group of people, these tested ones, before all others:

Do people think they will be left alone after saying 'We believe' without being put to the test?

QUR'AN 29:2

They had said, We believe. And they were tested, severely, for years, unable to reach Madinah, worn down in body but not

broken in resolve. They did not lose heart. When at last the way opened, they came.

The way out, and a death among the honoured

The way out came through the treaty of Hudaibiyah, and through one of its harshest-seeming clauses. The treaty held that any believer who escaped from Makkah to the Prophet ﷺ in Madinah had to be sent back. It looked, on its face, like a door slammed shut. But Allah opened it from an angle no one expected.

There was a man named Abu Basir, of whom the Prophet ﷺ had said that if he had companions, he could cause great trouble. Persecuted in Makkah, he reached Madinah, was returned under the treaty, escaped again, and then, on a hint from the Prophet ﷺ, set himself up outside Madinah where the treaty's clause could not bind him. He gathered to himself a band of fugitives, men who had broken out of Makkah and could not be received in Madinah, and they began to harass the Quraysh caravans running between Syria and Makkah. They squeezed the Makkans economically until the very people who had insisted on that clause came begging the Prophet ﷺ to take these men in and end the bleeding.

So the trap the Quraysh had built turned into the road home. The persecuted ones gathered with Abu Basir, and through that gathering Allah made a way for them at last to join the Prophet ﷺ in Madinah. Ayyash was among them. The chains, the years, the missed battles, all of it ended not by his own cleverness but by the decree of the One who had been petitioned for him every night.

It is worth pausing on the heartbreak folded into this. Had Ayyash listened to Umar on the road, he would have reached Madinah,

fought at Badr, walked the whole path with the Prophet ﷺ. Instead, one act of love for his mother sent him down a road of chains and waiting. And yet, as Dr. Suleiman reminds us, there is no "if." There is only what Allah decreed. Allah chose to test this man through his own goodness, and Allah chose, in His time, to bring him through.

His trial was not quite over. After Makkah was opened, Ayyash saw a man walking free who had once tortured him in the city, and assuming the man was still upon disbelief, he struck him down. Only afterward did he learn that the man had repented and embraced Islam. It was here, the majority of the commentators say, that this verse was revealed:

Never should a believer kill another believer, except by mistake.

QUR'AN 4:92

It was a mistake, made in the shadow of years of cruelty, and we trust that Allah is perfectly just to every soul, the One who will set all things right on the Day of Judgment.

Afterward Ayyash went on to serve in the great campaigns, especially in the era of Umar. He fought at Yarmuk, the decisive battle against the Byzantines, under the command of Khalid ibn al-Walid. And there, at Yarmuk, Ayyash and his companion Salama, the two men who had been tortured together in Makkah all those years before, were martyred. There is a famous scene from that battlefield, of a water-skin passed among the wounded and dying, each man waving it on to his brother, give it to so-and-so, until it returned and they had all passed on. Ayyash and Salama, who had lived together and suffered together, died together, and Khalid ordered that the two of them be buried in a

single grave. He wept as he led the funeral prayer over them, and he said that these were the best of Banu Makhzum, that there would never again be men like them from that tribe. They were the finest of what believed from the very clan of Abu Jahl.

What Ayyash's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a story like this and feel only sorrow for the man, or admiration for his endurance. Both responses miss the door it is trying to open in us. Ayyash's life is not just a sad story with a noble ending. It is a question Allah is putting to your own iman.

The first thing his life asks is whether you can trust Allah's decree when obedience leads you somewhere painful. Ayyash did a good thing for a good reason; he honoured his mother, which Allah commands. And it cost him years. We carry a quiet assumption that if we do the right thing, life will reward us with ease. His story dismantles that. Sometimes you will obey Allah, or honour a parent, or keep a trust, and the road will turn hard anyway. The believer's peace cannot rest on outcomes, because outcomes are not in our hands. There is no "if I had only chosen differently." There is only what Allah decreed, and the faith to say, He is wise, even here, even now. Contentment with the decree is not a feeling you wait to have; it is a choice you make in the dark.

The second thing his life asks is about hope, and the size of Allah's mercy. Ayyash bent under torture. He had a moment he must have been ashamed of for the rest of his life. And the verse came down: do not despair of God's mercy, God forgives all sins. If you are carrying some failure, some moment you broke when you wished you had stood, hear this carefully. Despair is not humility; it is a kind of arrogance, a belief that your sin is bigger than His forgiveness. It is not. The door Ayyash walked back

through is open to you. Turn around. Come back. He is the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful, and He said so about people who had been forced out of the faith itself.

The third thing is the strangest comfort of all, and you should hold onto it. For years, Ayyash sat in chains, and it must have looked, to him and to everyone, like a life going nowhere, faith wasted in a cell while the religion was being built somewhere else. He did not know that the Prophet ﷺ was raising his hands every night and calling his name to Allah. We almost never see the prayers being said for us, the mercy being arranged on our behalf while we sit in what feels like silence. What looks like abandonment may be the exact moment heaven is most concerned with you. Allah was not absent from that cell. He was answering, in His own time, in His own way, and He brought the man out through a road no one could have plotted.

So take something from Ayyash into the ordinary smallness of your own week. When you do a good deed and it brings you trouble instead of reward, do not let it sour your trust in Allah; that is the test, and steadiness through it is worth more than the ease you wanted. When you fall, do not sit in the rubble of your guilt; come back, because the One you are coming back to forgives all sins. And when your own life feels like waiting in chains, going nowhere, pray, and remember that you may be the object of a mercy you cannot yet see. Imitate his refusal to despair. It is the quality his whole life is built to teach, and it is the one most of us most need.

May Allah be pleased with Ayyash ibn Abi Rabiha, who loved his mother, who waited in chains while the Prophet ﷺ prayed for him by name, and who died among the best of his people. May Allah accept his sacrifice, forgive his moment of weakness as He

promised to forgive, and gather us with the patient ones who said "We believe" and held to it until they came home.

This chapter follows the account of Ayyash ibn Abi Rabiah (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (39:53, 29:2, 4:92). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Atika bint Zayd

The Wife of Many Martyrs

There are lives that ask us to imagine loss not once, but again and again, and to keep loving anyway. Atika bint Zayd (may Allah be pleased with her) was a woman who married, and was widowed, and married again, and was widowed again, until her people no longer spoke of bad luck when they spoke of her. They spoke of Paradise. They said that if a man wished to die a martyr, let him marry Atika, because every man she had taken into her home had been gathered, one after another, among the slain who are alive with their Lord. She buried husband after husband, and each grave held one of the finest men of that first generation. This is the story of a woman whose home was a doorway to martyrdom, and who walked through grief as others walk through prayer.

To understand her, you have to begin not with her, but with her father.

The daughter of the seeker

Her father was Zayd ibn Amr ibn Nufayl, and his is one of the most arresting stories in the whole record of the firsts. He was a man who lived in Makkah before the revelation came, and who, on his own, turned away from everything his people held sacred. He rejected the idols. He rejected wine. He rejected the burying of infant daughters alive, that cruel custom of the age, and when

he learned that a baby girl was about to be buried, he would go and take her, and bring her into his own home, and raise her until she was old enough to be married off in dignity. He was searching, his whole life, for the pure way of Ibrahim before that way had been gathered up and given back to the world through the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The Prophet ﷺ would later say of him that on the Day of Resurrection he will be raised as a single nation all by himself.

Zayd was driven out of Makkah for his refusal to bow, persecuted at the hands of al-Khattab, and he died before the first verse was revealed. But he left behind a longing he had spoken aloud: that his children would live to be companions of the awaited Prophet. He left two children to carry that hope. One was Sa'id ibn Zayd (may Allah be pleased with him), who became one of the ten given the glad tidings of Paradise. The other was this noble woman, Atika.

She was, by every account, remarkable. She was known for her beauty, spoken of as one of the most beautiful women of her time. She was known for her eloquence, a poet whose verses survive precisely because they were too fine to forget, verses she would compose to mourn the men she loved. She was known for her worship; Ibn Kathir records that she was a woman of deep and constant devotion. And she was known for a complete and well-rounded character, the kind of soul in whom beauty, intelligence, faith, and grace all sat together without crowding one another out. She was everything a person might hope to be. And Allah, in His wisdom, set such a woman at the very center of the first community, married in turn to some of its greatest men.

The husband who loved too much

The first to marry her was Abdullah ibn Abi Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), the son of Abu Bakr as-Siddiq. He is not the most famous of names, but he had already given quiet, dangerous service to Islam. In the days of the hijrah, when the Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr hid in the cave, it was Abdullah who moved through Makkah by day, listening to what Quraysh was plotting, and then slipped out at night to carry the news to them. He was one of the early Muslims, very young when he believed.

When he married Atika, he fell into a love so consuming that it began to pull him away from everything else. He loved her so much that he held himself back from good deeds simply to remain in her company. He was rarely seen in the masjid. He was absent from the service that the household of Abu Bakr was expected to give. The honeymoon, you might say, went on far too long, and a young man who should have been building the new community was instead disappearing into his own happiness. To love one's spouse is no fault; the Prophet ﷺ loved his wives dearly. But this had tipped into something excessive, an attachment to the dunya that was quietly costing him his place among those who strove.

So Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) intervened, and pressed his son to part from her, to loosen a grip that had grown unhealthy and to recover his attachment to the deen. It must be said plainly, as the teacher of this story insisted: this was a singular situation, not a rule for anyone to imitate. No parent reading this is Abu Bakr, and no spouse is Abdullah. This was a unique correction, meant to teach one man a lesson in detachment from the world.

Abdullah obeyed, but his heart did not let go easily, and out of the wound he wrote poetry. He swore he would never forget her

so long as the sun rose in the sky by day or a single bird crossed the heavens by night. He praised her character, her intelligence, her nobility. He said he could not see how a man like him could ever divorce a woman like her, nor how a woman like her could ever be sent away. The verses were so full of grief that Abu Bakr, hearing the depth of his son's love, relented and told him to take her back. He had never wanted to break the young man's heart; he had only wanted him to stand up and serve. And serve Abdullah did. Years later, in the fighting at Ta'if, he was struck by an arrow, and that wound eventually took his life back in Madinah. He died a martyr, the first of the husbands Atika would lose.

She mourned him as a poet mourns. She swore an oath over his grave: that her eyes would never cease to weep for him, and that her skin would never again touch a sweet perfume, that she would remain, as it were, in the dust of grief for the rest of her days. She meant to spend her life mourning him.

The oath, and the gentle way around it

Some time passed, and a proposal came from Zayd ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), the brother of Umar ibn al-Khattab and of Fatima bint al-Khattab. Pause here, because the threads of this family knot together in a way that only Allah could weave. It was al-Khattab, the father, who had once persecuted Atika's own father, Zayd ibn Amr, beating him and driving him from Makkah for calling people to the worship of one God. And now the children of that very man were marrying into the family of the one he had persecuted. Atika's brother Sa'id had married Fatima bint al-Khattab, whose Islam had been the turning point in her brother Umar's heart. And now Atika herself was to marry into the house of al-Khattab. The man who had

tried to crush the spread of faith through the preaching of Zayd ibn Amr would find, by the decree of Allah, that the seed and the fruit of that faith ran straight through his own descendants.

But Atika had taken an oath never to marry again, and she did not wish to break it, nor did she wish to turn away a man as fine as Zayd. He came to her with wisdom rather than pressure. He reminded her that she should not make unlawful for herself what Allah had made lawful, the same gentle truth that was spoken to so many of the widows of the martyrs, women who, like Asma bint Umays, were married in turn to more than one of the best of men. Then he did something tender and clever. He took the very poem she had composed for Abdullah, and he changed its words. Where she had sworn her eyes would never rest, he reshaped the line so that her eyes might find peace after all. Where she had sworn her skin would never touch perfume, he replaced the perfume of mourning with a particular sweet scent, showing her, through her own verses, that the oath had been hers to take and could honourably be set down. She married him.

Then came the battle of al-Yamamah, in the wars against those who turned back after the Prophet ﷺ passed, and Zayd ibn al-Khattab was killed there, a martyr. He had embraced Islam before his brother Umar, and he was taken to his Lord before him too. Both the brother and the sister of al-Khattab, Zayd and Fatima, had reached faith ahead of Umar, and Zayd reached martyrdom ahead of him as well. And so Atika, twice married, was twice a widow, and both of her husbands had died as martyrs.

A home where martyrs were gathered

She was widowed again, and again she had taken an oath, and again a great man would not let a vow that Allah never required keep her in lonely grief. This time it was Umar ibn al-Khattab

(may Allah be pleased with him)himself, the Commander of the Believers. There are several accounts of their marriage, and through them you see the man's scrupulousness about his office. Umar was wary of any worldly comfort or favour reaching his family on account of his position as Caliph, and he was watchful even of the small goods that might come to his household. He was also, by some narrations, uneasy about her going out to pray in the masjid in the evenings. Yet he did not forbid her, because the Prophet ﷺ had commanded that women not be prevented from the houses of Allah. And so Atika went on insisting, evening after evening, on her place in the masjid, and Umar honoured the Prophet's word above his own discomfort.

Then Umar was struck down, assassinated as he led the prayer. And Atika had now lived to see three of her husbands taken as martyrs: Abdullah, then Zayd, and now Umar. She wept for him, and she composed poetry for him as she had for the others.

By now you can imagine what people might whisper. Three husbands, three graves, every man who married her cut down. Did they recoil from her, did they speak of a bad omen, did they say her hand brought death? They did not. They drew the opposite conclusion entirely. They looked at the pattern and saw not misfortune but mercy, and they said: men, if any of you longs to be a martyr, marry Atika, for this is plainly the path that Allah has laid for whoever enters her home. Her grief had become, in the eyes of the believers, a sign of honour.

And so the fourth came forward, and he was no lesser a man than the others. He was az-Zubayr ibn al-Awwam (may Allah be pleased with him), one of the ten given the glad tidings of Paradise. If you set az-Zubayr beside Umar, you find men cut from similar cloth: both physically powerful, both raised under

hard circumstances, both fierce in temperament, both among the ten promised the Garden. Az-Zubayr married her. And then he too was taken. He had withdrawn from the field of battle, and he was killed while he stood in his prayer, struck down in the very act of bowing his head to Allah. Four husbands now, four of the most beloved companions of the Prophet ﷺ, four who had gone ahead to their Lord.

There remained one more. The fifth man to marry Atika bint Zayd was none other than al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him), the grandson of the Prophet ﷺ, whose own martyrdom would become one of the most tragic in all of history, and at the same time one of the deaths that lifts a person to the very pleasure of his Lord. But here the pattern of her life broke in mercy: Atika did not live to witness al-Husayn's martyrdom. She died before him. Every other husband she had buried; this last grief she was spared.

Five husbands, and the histories count every one of them among the martyrs, and among the greatest of the companions, and among those most beloved to the Prophet ﷺ. Imagine what passed through that one woman's home across the years: the son of as-Siddiq, two of the family of al-Khattab one of them the Caliph himself, the disciple az-Zubayr, and the grandson of the Messenger of Allah. Truly precious, the company that crossed her threshold.

The long life behind the grief

She lived about seventy-two years, and she died during the caliphate of Mu'awiyah. She was remembered for her eloquence and her poetry, for her knowledge, for her worship, and for her character, the same gifts she had carried from the beginning, only now deepened by a lifetime of loss and patience.

It is worth sitting with the shape of her life rather than rushing past it. She did not lose her husbands in some single catastrophe that might have hardened her all at once. She lost them one by one, across decades, each time rebuilding a heart, each time learning again to love a man she might soon bury, each time composing the verses of her grief and then, when a worthy man asked and reminded her that Allah had not forbidden what she had forbidden herself, opening her life again. There is a particular kind of courage in that. Anyone can endure a single blow and call it fate. To keep choosing love, to keep opening the door, knowing what so often walked back out of it, that is a faith that has made its peace with the decree of Allah at a level most of us never reach.

And notice what her father's longing became. Zayd ibn Amr had been driven from Makkah, persecuted, and buried before the revelation came, with nothing in his hands but a hope that his children would live to walk with the Prophet. He never saw it. But through his daughter Atika and his son Sa'id, the very seed of the faith he had searched for took root and bore fruit for generations. The man who was hounded for his monotheism became, through his offspring, woven into the heart of the believing community. Allah honoured a seeker's hope long after the seeker was gone.

What Atika's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel a distant awe, to file Atika away as a woman who suffered grandly in a heroic age and has nothing to say to a quiet life lived now. That would be a mistake. Her life is not a monument set behind glass. It is a question pressed gently against our own iman.

She was content with the decree of Allah when His decree took, again and again, the thing she loved most. This is the heart of it.

We are quick to praise Allah when His gifts arrive and slow, so slow, when He takes them back. Atika held to her Lord through five graves. She wept, she grieved, she wrote her sorrow into verse, and never once did her grief curdle into bitterness against the One who had decreed it. That is the contentment, the rida, that faith is reaching for: not the absence of pain, but the refusal to let pain become resentment of Allah. When loss comes to you, and it will come, her life asks whether your trust in your Lord is rooted deeply enough to outlast the things you were sure you could not live without. The believer does not say "why me." The believer says, as she did with her tears still falling, that this is from Allah, and what is from Allah is good even when it wounds.

She kept her worship at the center of everything. Through marriage and widowhood and marriage again, she was known above all for her ibadah, her devotion, her insistence on her place in the masjid in the evenings even when it was not easy. The men in her life came and were taken; her relationship with Allah remained, the one bond that no arrow and no battle could sever. There is a lesson in that for an ordinary life. People will enter your days and leave them. Health will come and go. The only attachment that loss cannot touch is your attachment to Allah, and it is worth building now, in the steady, unglamorous habits of prayer and remembrance, so that when everything else is stripped away you are still holding the one rope that does not break.

And her father's story carries its own quiet promise. He spent good in secret, raised his children for the sake of a faith he would not live to see formalized, and rescued infant girls from the dust with no audience but Allah. He died without the reward in his hands, and Allah honoured every part of it through his children. This is the promise that should change how you spend your days:

the good you do for Allah is never lost, even when you do not live to see what it becomes. The dua you make for your children, the sincerity you guard when no one is watching, the small mercy you show to someone who can never repay you, none of it falls to the ground. Allah keeps what is given to Him.

So take something concrete from her into your own life, this week, for the sake of Allah and no one else. When the next disappointment lands, the next loss large or small, meet it with one sentence of contentment instead of complaint, and mean it. Guard one prayer this week as though it were the last rope you are holding, because in truth it is. And do one quiet good that no one will ever connect to your name, the way her father lifted girls out of the dust, trusting that the only One whose notice matters has already seen it. That is how Atika and her father lived: in patience, in worship, in sincerity, in a settled trust that Allah does not waste what is entrusted to Him. May Allah be pleased with Atika bint Zayd and with her father, grant us a measure of her contentment with His decree, and let us hold fast to Him when everything else is taken.

This chapter follows the account of Atika bint Zayd (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed. No Qur'anic verses are quoted directly, as the source recounts her life through narration and poetry rather than a specific cited verse.

Abdullah ibn Hudhafah

The Man Who Would Not Flinch

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ once said that the greatest jihad, the greatest striving in the path of Allah, is to speak a word of truth in the face of a tyrant. It is a striking thing to say. We tend to imagine the highest struggle on a battlefield, sword in hand. But here the standard is set somewhere quieter and somehow harder: a single believer, standing before a man with the power to kill him, who refuses to say anything but the truth.

There was a man among the companions who lived this hadith twice over. He stood before the two greatest tyrants of his age, the emperor of Persia and the emperor of Rome, and he did not bend before either of them. His name was Abdullah ibn Hudhafah (may Allah be pleased with him), and his story shows you exactly what the Prophet ﷺ was able to cultivate in the young men and women who gathered around him, hearts that faced every form of persecution and refused to turn back on their heels.

A young man in the shadow of his brother

Abdullah belonged to the early ones, the believers who embraced Islam at the very beginning, when belief cost everything and promised nothing the world could see. He was brought to faith by his older brother, Qays, who also carried him along on the hijra, the migration the early Muslims made to escape the persecution of Makkah. So whatever good Abdullah

went on to do, his brother shares in the reward of it, a quiet reminder that the one who guides another to faith keeps a portion of every good deed that follows.

But Abdullah was young. He was too young, when the great battles came, to take his place in the ranks beside the Prophet ﷺ. He could not fight at Badr, though he had already made the hijra. He could not fight at Uhud. And so for a time he waited, a believer with a heart full of devotion and no obvious way to show it. Many of us know that feeling, watching others do visible, weighty things for the sake of Allah while we wonder where our own moment is.

His moment came later, as he grew older, and when it came it was not on a battlefield. It was in two rooms, far from home, where he stood alone in front of men accustomed to being obeyed by entire nations.

The letter to the emperor of Persia

In the years when the Prophet ﷺ began to send letters to the kings and emperors of the world, calling them to Islam, he chose Abdullah to carry the letter to Kisra, the emperor of Persia. This was no small errand. Kisra was, in the words of the account, the most arrogant tyrant of the day, ruler of one of the two great empires of the earth. The message carried enormous political weight, and there was a real chance that the man who delivered it would not come back alive.

The Prophet ﷺ gave Abdullah a clear instruction: take this letter, and place it into the emperor's hand yourself. Deliver it by hand, directly.

Abdullah went, and he went completely unfazed. When he arrived, Kisra sent a messenger to take the letter from him, as

was the custom, so that no commoner would approach the throne directly. Abdullah refused. "No," he said. My Prophet ﷺ commanded me to deliver this into the hand of Kisra. He would not hand it to anyone else. He insisted until the letter passed directly from his hand to the emperor's.

The letter, when it was read, began: from Muhammad the Messenger of Allah, to Kisra, the great one of Persia. It called him with a single word that held both an invitation and a warning. Accept Islam, and you will find peace, and you will carry the reward of the belief of all your people. Refuse, and you will bear the burden of their disbelief.

Kisra did not like what he read. In a fury he tore the letter to pieces in front of Abdullah. He threatened Abdullah, and he threatened the Prophet ﷺ himself, and he would later even plot to have the Prophet ﷺ killed. There is something almost childish in it, the most powerful man in his world reduced to shredding a piece of paper because its words frightened him.

When Abdullah returned and told the Prophet ﷺ what had happened, he was still composed. He had not panicked in front of that tyrant. He had not lost his bearing. And the Prophet ﷺ responded with words that would outlive the empire that produced Kisra: may Allah tear apart his kingdom the way he tore apart that letter.

From that point, the Persian empire fell into a long internal collapse. Coup followed coup, assassination followed assassination, sons killing fathers and siblings turning on one another, until the whole structure was eaten away from within. The man who tore one letter saw his kingdom torn to shreds, and that, the account tells us, was from the supplication of the Prophet ﷺ. Abdullah had carried the truth into the throne room

of Persia and stood firm, and that firmness was only the prelude to the test for which he is truly remembered.

Captured by Rome

Years later, in the time after the Prophet ﷺ had passed, Abdullah went out with the Muslim armies against the Byzantines, the Romans. In the fighting he was captured, taken prisoner along with a large group of Muslims, hundreds of them held in the hands of the empire.

The emperor was Heraclius, and Heraclius was no ordinary tyrant. He was shrewd. He understood that breaking the Muslims from the inside might do what swords could not. So he gave an order: bring me the captive these men consider their leader, the noblest among them, the one they look up to as their senior. The Muslims pointed to Abdullah, and they brought him out and stood him before the emperor of Rome.

What followed was not torture, not at first. It was a test, carefully designed, escalating step by step, and at every step Abdullah refused to break.

Heraclius began with an offer. Renounce your religion, he said. Become a Christian, and I will give you half of my kingdom. He was probing first, before he hurt him, because he saw a mind game worth playing here. If he could turn the man the others looked to, he could shatter the morale of every captive in his prisons.

Abdullah answered him without flinching. By Allah, he said, if you gave me everything you possess, not half but your entire empire, the whole of the Roman Empire, and you gave me everything the Arabs possess as well, all of it together, I would not leave my religion of Islam for the blink of an eye.

Imagine the scene. A prisoner, alone, standing before the ruler of a brutal empire, and there is no fear in him at all. Not bravado, but a deep and settled refusal. The kind of answer that comes only from a heart that has already decided where it stands.

Every temptation, refused

Heraclius did not give up. He simply changed his method.

Let me try something else with him, he said. He ordered Abdullah returned to his cell, and then he sent in the most beautiful woman he could find, to seduce him there in private and break him that way. So they pushed this woman into his cell and left her to her work. And Abdullah turned away. Whichever way she came, he turned the other. If she approached from his right, he turned to his left; if she came from his left, he turned to his right. He would not so much as look at her. She tried everything she knew, and he remained completely unmoved, holding to his faith even in that.

Eventually she gave up and came out, and what she said is its own kind of testimony. I have never seen anything like this man, she said. It is as if he is made of stone. As if he is a statue. He did not flinch.

So Heraclius escalated again. Starve him, he ordered. No food, no water, for three days. Let us see what happens to him then. And they left him in his cell to hunger and thirst.

At the end of the three days came the next trick, more cunning than the last. Heraclius had pork and wine brought to the starving man. Now here is a detail worth pausing on, because the account itself pauses on it. From the standpoint of Islamic law, Abdullah was permitted to eat in that moment. A person dying of hunger and thirst has the allowance to consume what is otherwise

forbidden, to preserve life. He had every excuse. This was no longer about whether the food was forbidden.

It was about something else, and Abdullah understood exactly what. He refused. Heraclius pressed him: does your own religion not allow you to eat this in such hardship? Yes, Abdullah answered. It does. But I did not want to give you the pleasure of seeing a companion of the Messenger of Allah eat pork and drink wine, so that you could mock his religion.

Read that slowly. He was not protecting himself from sin; the allowance was real. He was protecting the honor of the religion of Allah in the eyes of a man who was looking for any excuse to belittle it. He refused the empire. He refused the seduction. And now, half-dead with hunger, he refused even the lawful relief his own faith offered him, because taking it would have handed the enemy a small victory over the dignity of Islam.

Strung up, and unbroken

Heraclius moved to open cruelty. Put him in the position of crucifixion, he ordered. They strung Abdullah up. Then the emperor called for his warriors and commanded them to hurl spears and shoot arrows at him from every side, around his head, around his body, so that he would feel the threat closing in from every direction at once. Picture him hanging there as the arrows fly and the spears come, each one passing close to his face, his limbs, his head, and missing. And still he did not flinch.

Who is this man, the watchers must have wondered. What is he made of? This was a man who had become Muslim as a child, in the company of the Prophet ﷺ, and something had been built inside him in those years, a faith and certainty that simply would

not move. Iman and yaqin, cultivated young, holding firm now under a rain of spears.

Heraclius had him brought down. He tried the offer again, sweetening it: leave your religion and take mine, and I will give you half my empire and marry you to my daughter. No, Abdullah said. Absolutely not. There is nothing that would make me leave my religion.

Then comes the part of the account that Abdullah himself found hardest to relate, and it shows the true mind of the tyrant. Heraclius ordered a great container of boiling oil set before Abdullah. Then he had another of the Muslim prisoners brought out and thrown into it before Abdullah's eyes. The man screamed, and within seconds his flesh was stripped from his body and his bones rose to the surface. This was cruelty meant to do what nothing else had done, to break a man by making him watch, and to tell him without words: you are next.

Pick him up, Heraclius said, and throw him in as well. They lifted Abdullah and carried him toward the oil. And as they did, he began to cry.

Why he wept

Heraclius saw the tears and thought, at last, that he had won. At last he has broken. He is afraid. Bring him back to me, the emperor ordered.

Abdullah was brought before him. Once more Heraclius made his offer: take half my empire, renounce your faith. No, said Abdullah. Then why did you cry, Heraclius asked. Are you not afraid of what I am about to do to you?

No, Abdullah said. That is not why I was crying. Then why? And here is the sentence that breaks the whole logic of the tyrant's game. I was crying, Abdullah said, because I wished I had a hundred souls, and that every one of them could be given for the sake of Allah, the way this one is about to be. I was not crying out of fear. I was crying because I knew this was the end, this was martyrdom, the very thing I had watched so many of my companions attain, and I wished I could give everything to Allah a hundred times over.

The emperor was stunned. He had tried to break this man with greed, with desire, with hunger, with terror, with the sight of a comrade boiled alive, and the man had not only refused to break, he wept that he had only one life to lose. There was nothing left in the emperor's arsenal. He had been defeated by a prisoner.

So Heraclius reached for the only thing that might let him save face in front of his own people. Kiss my forehead, he said, and I will set you free. Just that one gesture, an acknowledgment of the emperor's superiority, and Abdullah could walk out alive.

Abdullah refused even that. I do not want to kiss your head, he said, and I do not want you to kiss mine. Even this small thing, for his own freedom alone, he would not do.

The bargain he was willing to make

Then the emperor, still negotiating, raised the stakes in the other direction. If you kiss my forehead, he said, I will free sixty of the Muslim captives along with you.

And here Abdullah's refusal turned into something else. He had refused to bow for his own life. But sixty of his brothers, then all of them, were a different matter. If you want me to kiss your head, he said, you will not free sixty. You will free every Muslim

you hold. Heraclius, perhaps relieved to have any way out, agreed: all three hundred of them could go free if Abdullah would kiss his head.

So Abdullah went to the emperor and kissed his forehead, and the three hundred captives, companions and those who came after them, were released and taken home to Madinah.

Look closely at what just happened, because it is the deepest part of the whole story. The same man who would not lower himself by a hair for his own freedom lowered himself completely, gladly, to free three hundred others. His refusal had never been about pride. When the kiss was about his own ego, it was unthinkable. When the kiss could ransom three hundred souls, it was nothing at all. He did not let his own dignity stand in the way of saving his brothers. Honor, and the humbling of oneself, were both for the sake of Allah, and he knew the difference exactly.

When they reached Madinah, the leader of the believers, Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), understood it too. He went up to Abdullah and kissed him on the forehead, the very forehead that had bent before the emperor to free the captives, and he ordered all the Muslims to do the same, to go and kiss Abdullah's head, in honor of what he had done.

Abdullah ibn Hudhafah went on striving in the path of Allah. He lived into the caliphate of Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him), and he died in Egypt in the year 33 after the hijra. One of the first to believe, a man we never saw fight in the great battles of the Prophet's life, who shone instead in a Roman prison cell, and whose light has not dimmed since.

What this life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a story like this and feel a clean rush of admiration, and then to set it down and go back to a life that looks nothing like a Byzantine prison. But Abdullah's life was not given to us to admire from a safe distance. It is a question pressed against our own iman, and the question is sharper than it first appears.

The tyrant believed he understood human beings. He believed that every person has a price, a fear, a hunger, a desire that, pressed hard enough, will make them let go of whatever they claim to hold. With most people he would have been right. What he could not comprehend was a man whose deepest attachment was not to his own life at all, but to Allah. You cannot break a person with the threat of death when that person grieves only that he has one death to give and not a hundred. This is the freedom that faith offers: not freedom from hardship, but freedom from the grip the world keeps on a heart, the fear that lets tyrants and temptations rule us. Abdullah was the freest man in that palace, and he was the one in chains.

Notice where that freedom came from. He was not, by his own reckoning, an extraordinary man. He missed Badr. He missed Uhud. He spent years as the younger brother with no visible role, a believer waiting for a moment that seemed never to come. But something had been built in him in those quiet years, a certainty in Allah that did not depend on circumstances, and when the test finally arrived, that certainty was simply there, immovable. This is worth holding onto, because most of our lives are quiet years. The conviction that holds a person steady in the hardest hour is not summoned in that hour. It is grown slowly, in the ordinary days when nothing seems to be happening, in the prayers offered when no one is watching, in the small daily choices to prefer

Allah. Build it now, in the calm, and it will be there when you need it.

See, too, what he was protecting. When the pork and wine were set before him and the law itself permitted him to eat, he still refused, because eating would have let an enemy mock the religion of Allah. He was not guarding his own record of sins; the allowance was real and he knew it. He was guarding the honor of his Lord's religion in front of someone who despised it. We are not often boiled in oil for our faith, but we are watched, and the way we carry ourselves either honors or cheapens the name of the One we worship in the eyes of those around us. There is a quiet jihad in simply being a Muslim whose conduct gives no one an excuse to mock Islam.

And see the thing that should reach furthest into your own life: the difference between his two refusals to bow. For himself, never. For three hundred others, in an instant. His unbending dignity and his total humility came from the same root, because both were for Allah and neither was for his ego. How much of what we call self-respect is really only pride, the refusal to apologize, to serve, to lower ourselves for someone else's good? Abdullah shows that real honor is not the inability to bend; it is knowing exactly when bending is the higher act of worship. The man who would not kiss a forehead to save his own skin kissed it gladly to save his brothers, and Umar kissed his in return. That is what honor looks like when it belongs to Allah and not to the self.

So take something from him into your own ordinary week, something small and real. Choose one place where you have been holding firm out of pride and ask whether humbling yourself there might serve Allah better. Guard your conduct in one situation where a watching person might judge the faith by you.

And in the quiet days, the unremarkable ones with no test in sight, build the certainty now, through prayer and remembrance and the private preferring of Allah, so that whatever moment comes for you one day, your heart is already decided. May Allah be pleased with Abdullah ibn Hudhafah, who would not flinch before kings because he had given his fear to Allah alone, and may Allah grant us a measure of his certainty, and gather us among those who spoke the truth and did not turn back.

This chapter follows the account of Abdullah ibn Hudhafah (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The hadith on the greatest jihad being a word of truth before a tyrant, and the wording of the Prophet's ﷺ letter to Kisra, are related as in that account. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Khunais ibn Hudhafah

The Quiet First

There is a kind of man whose name never reaches us, though almost everything good in a story passed through his hands. Ask yourself how many people you have met named Khunais. Ask yourself how many times you have heard the name spoken from a pulpit. Now hold that against what he actually did: he was among the first twenty human beings to accept Islam, he carried more than a dozen souls to the faith with him, he migrated twice for the sake of Allah, he fought at Badr, and he died of wounds taken at Uhud, buried by the hands of the Prophet ﷺ himself. He owns nearly every honour the earliest believers could own. And still the Muslims barely remember his name.

This is the story of a man who was responsible for so much good, and who asked for none of the credit.

A young man from Banu Sahm

Khunais ibn Hudhafah (may Allah be pleased with him) was from Quraysh, from the clan of Banu Sahm. He was the elder of his family, the older brother of Abdullah ibn Hudhafah, whose own legacy in Islam would one day grow large. At the time the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ began calling people to Allah, Khunais was still a young man, somewhere in his teens, and his brothers were younger still, some of them only children.

His nickname tells you something gentle about him before his story even begins. He was called Abu Hudhafah, the father of Hudhafah, in the manner of the Arabs who would look forward to the son they hoped to have and name him after the boy's own grandfather. It was the most ordinary of expectations: that a young man would grow, marry, and have a son to carry the family name forward. He carried that name, Abu Hudhafah, through the days of ignorance and into Islam. As you will see, the son it promised never came. But the name stayed, like a quiet hope held open his whole life.

Among the first twenty

Most of those who entered Islam in its earliest days entered through one door: the direct call of Abu Bakr as-Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him). Abu Bakr would speak to the people he knew and trusted, and a remarkable number of the young men of Makkah answered him. Khunais was one of them. He heard the call alongside some of his friends, and he believed.

What is worth pausing over is when he believed. He was among those who embraced Islam before the believers ever gathered in the house of al-Arqam, before there was a safe room in Makkah where the early Muslims could meet and learn in secret. That places him, by the reckoning of the historians, among perhaps the first twenty people to accept this religion at all. Try to picture that number. Not the first twenty thousand, or the first twenty hundred. The first twenty souls on the face of the earth to say that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad ﷺ is His Messenger. He was one of them. And almost no one knows his name.

He did not keep the faith to himself. Being the elder of his household, he went home and brought his family with him. He

brought his two younger brothers, Abdullah among them, still children. He brought seven of his cousins. He brought four more members of Banu Sahm. He gathered them as their senior man, the one they looked to, and he led them all into Islam. One young believer, and a dozen others entered the religion in his shadow. Then, when the persecution of Makkah grew too heavy to bear, he took that same migration further: Khunais was among the noble company who made the hijra to Abyssinia, leaving their homes to preserve their faith under a just Christian king across the sea.

The man who chose him for his daughter

After the migration to Abyssinia, Khunais was among those who returned to Makkah, where he was given protection by one of the city's people. And it was here that a particular man looked at him and saw something he wanted for his own family.

That man was Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him). Umar was not easily impressed. He was a man who could see through weak character at a glance, a man of deep and unusual perception, a man whose instincts were so sound that revelation would later confirm them again and again. When a man like that examines a young believer and decides he is worthy, that is no small endorsement. Umar had one daughter at the time, Hafsa (may Allah be pleased with her), his eldest, and he wanted for her a proper suitor: not the richest or the most connected man in Makkah, but one of the first and strongest of the believers, someone who had already shown great faith and great character. He offered her hand to Khunais.

So the two were married. Khunais was likely in his late teens or just into his twenties; Hafsa was around fourteen, for in those days people married young. A small Muslim household formed

under the weight of Makkah's persecution, a young husband and a young wife holding to a faith their city despised. And note the quiet order of things here. Khunais accepted Islam first. Umar, his father-in-law, would come to Islam only afterward. The young man had entered the light before the towering figure whose daughter he married, and before the man whose name history would never forget.

To Madinah, and to Badr

When Umar made the hijra to Madinah, Khunais and Hafsa went with him. They were part of that migrating group, and in their new city they were hosted by a man of the Ansar named Abu Abs. A young couple, twice uprooted now, settling into the life of the first Muslim community. Khunais was close to the Prophet ﷺ, and that closeness only deepened when his own father-in-law, Umar, entered Islam and stood among the believers too.

Then came Badr, in the year 624. And here Khunais earned a distinction so quiet that you could read past it without noticing what it cost.

Islam had abolished the arrogance of tribe. But the old habits of blood did not vanish overnight, and in the aftermath of a battle, when the army was counted and the families gathered to find their own, men still looked instinctively for the faces of their tribe and their kin. Khunais was the only member of Banu Sahm who fought at Badr. The only one. Every other man on that field had someone there from his family or his clan, someone to stand beside, someone to look for when the dust settled. Khunais stood alone among his people, his younger brothers still too young to carry a sword. While others moved forward shoulder to shoulder with their relatives, he went forward on his own, with nothing to lean on but his faith.

He came home from Badr a veteran of the greatest day the believers had yet seen. Think of what he had now gathered. One of the first to accept Islam. One who carried his family into it. One who made the hijra to Abyssinia, and then to Madinah. And now one of the people of Badr, those few hundred whose names the angels knew. These are the marks a believer would give anything to carry when he finally meets his Lord. Khunais carried them all, and was barely older than a boy.

Uhud, and a grave beside Uthman

A year later came Uhud, and Khunais was there too. His name is not usually written in the formal lists of the martyrs of that day, and so it is easy to miss. But what the histories tell us is this: at Uhud he took a wound, and that wound did not heal. It carried him, some time later, to his death. By that measure he is counted among the shuhada of Uhud, a man who gave his life slowly, over weeks, to an injury earned in the path of Allah.

When he died, it was the Prophet ﷺ himself who attended to him. The Prophet ﷺ prayed the janazah over Khunais, and the Prophet ﷺ lowered him into the earth. And he buried him in a place of great tenderness, right beside Uthman ibn Maz'un, the companion the Prophet ﷺ had loved so dearly and wept over so openly. To be laid to rest in that company, by those hands, is a station few ever reach.

He and Hafsa were never given the son whose name he had carried his whole life. Abu Hudhafah died without a Hudhafah. The hope folded into his nickname was never answered in this world. And Hafsa, still in her late teens, was now a widow.

What followed, because of what he began

What happened next is one of the gentlest turns in the whole story, and Khunais never lived to see it.

His young widow, Hafsa, became the subject of her father's careful search for a righteous husband. Umar went first to the two best men he could think of, offering Hafsa's hand to Abu Bakr and then to Uthman. In the end, the one who married Hafsa was better than them all: the Prophet ﷺ himself took her as his wife, and so the daughter Umar had once given to Khunais became a Mother of the Believers. Uthman, in turn, was married to a daughter of the Prophet ﷺ. The quiet first husband, dead of his wounds, had been the beginning of a thread that ran straight into the household of the Prophet ﷺ.

And there is a wider legacy still. The Prophet ﷺ taught that the one who guides another to good receives a reward like the one who does the good himself. Hold that beside what Khunais did. He took his little brother Abdullah by the hand and brought him, as a child, into Islam. That same Abdullah ibn Hudhafah would grow into a companion whose courage and faith became famous across the ummah, a man whose story is still told with awe. Every drop of that good began with an older brother who simply refused to enter the light alone. Khunais will not have lost a single share of it.

This is the strange arithmetic of a hidden life. A man whose own name slipped almost entirely from the memory of the Muslims stands behind a Mother of the Believers, behind a celebrated companion, behind a dozen souls who found their faith through him. He held every honour and claimed none of the fame.

What Khunais's life asks of our faith

It is easy to want the kind of life that gets remembered. We measure ourselves, often without admitting it, by whether our good is seen, named, counted, repeated. Khunais ibn Hudhafah lived a life almost no one repeats, and yet by the measure of Allah it was among the most complete lives a believer could live. His story puts a hard and freeing question to our own iman: are you working for the eyes of people, or for the eyes of Allah alone?

Look at what he did when he believed. He did not believe quietly and keep it safe. He went home and carried his brothers, his cousins, his clansmen into the faith with him. The first quality to take from him is this: that real iman does not hoard the good it has found. It reaches for the people beside you. You almost certainly have a younger sibling, a friend, a child, someone who looks to you the way Khunais's family looked to him. The most lasting thing you may ever do is take one of them by the hand toward Allah, and then never hear about the fruit of it in this life, as Khunais never did. The reward of the one who guides to good is kept with Allah whether or not the world ever connects your name to it.

Look, too, at Badr, where he stood as the only man of his tribe, with no kinsman at his side. There is a loneliness in faith that no one warns you about: the moment when the people who should be standing with you are simply not there, and you must go forward anyway, leaning on nothing but your trust in Allah. Khunais shows us that a believer does not need a crowd to do the right thing. He needs only the certainty that Allah is enough. When you find yourself the only one in the room holding to what is right, remember the man who walked onto the field of Badr with no one from his clan behind him, and was not alone, because his Lord was with him.

And look at the son who never came. Khunais carried the name Abu Hudhafah his whole life, hoping for a boy who was never born, and died with that hope unanswered. Most of us are carrying some hope like that, some good and natural thing we have asked Allah for and not received. His life teaches contentment with the decree of Allah: that a life can be denied its dearest wish and still be a triumph, because its worth was never in the wish. Allah withheld the son and gave him Badr, gave him martyrdom, gave him a grave beside a beloved companion, gave him a place among the first twenty. Trust that what your Lord withholds, He withholds for something, and that the account is settled with Him, not here.

So take something small and real from this quiet first into your own day. Bring one person a step closer to Allah and tell no one. Do one good deed that no human eye will ever record. Stand for what is right the next time you are the only one standing. And when a hope of yours goes unanswered, do not let it sour your heart toward the One who decreed it, for He may be saving you a Badr you cannot yet see. That is how Khunais ibn Hudhafah lived: in faith without fame, in service without a witness, in trust without complaint. May Allah be pleased with him, and may He grant us a measure of his sincerity, and gather us among those whose good He saw, even when no one else ever did.

This chapter follows the account of Khunais ibn Hudhafah (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). It quotes no Qur'an; the report that "the one who guides to good is like the one who does it" is the words of the Prophet ﷺ as related in the

lecture. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Al-Shifa bint Abdullah

The Healer and the Teacher

In a city where almost no one could read, there lived a woman who could. In an age when the alphabet was the possession of a few, she held a pen with ease, treated the sick with skill, and carried in her head a kind of wisdom that the most powerful man of her time would later seek out before he made his decisions. Her name was not even her name. The people called her Al-Shifa, the healing, because that is what she brought to those who came to her, and the title stayed with her until the day she died and long after. We know her best for the role she played after the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had already left this world. But her story does not begin there. It begins much earlier, among the very first souls in all of Makkah to believe.

A rare woman in a city of few letters

Her given name was Leila. She was Al-Shifa bint Abdullah, daughter of Abdullah ibn Abd al-Shams and Fatima bint Wahb, and she belonged to Quraysh, to the clan of Banu Adi, the same clan that would later produce Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him). She married Abu Hathma ibn Hudhayfa, and together they raised two sons, Sulayman and Masruq (may Allah be pleased with them).

To understand what made her remarkable, you have to picture the Makkah of her day. It was a society that carried its poetry and

its lineages in memory, not on paper. When the histories speak of Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), they note that the overwhelming majority of his people could neither read nor write. By the count of the biographers, there were perhaps twenty or thirty people in the entire city who possessed the skill of literacy. Al-Shifa was one of them, and she was one of the very few women among that small number.

She did not stop at reading and writing. She learned medicine, which is how she earned the name that would define her. And she was a calligrapher, an artist of the letter, someone who did not merely put words to paper but shaped them beautifully, and who taught others to do the same. In a world that prized the spoken word above all, she had quietly gathered the rarest set of skills a person could hold. Her reputation rested on two things above the rest: her hikma, her wisdom, and her command of the written word.

We do not know the exact day she embraced Islam, but we know it was early, within the first three years of the Prophet's call ﷺ, when belief still cost a person everything and the believers could be counted on a few hands. Her name often surfaces in connection with events that came after the Prophet's lifetime ﷺ, which can give the false impression that she was a latecomer. She was not. She was among the firsts. And when the believers left Makkah for Madinah, she was among the first women to make the Hijrah, leaving behind the only home she had ever known for the sake of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ.

The house between the mosque and the market

When she reached Madinah, a house was set up for her, and its location tells you something about who she was. It stood between the masjid and the marketplace. On one side, the center

of worship. On the other, the center of trade. And Al-Shifa lived in between, which is exactly where her gifts belonged, for she understood both the things of the soul and the things of the world.

She had a particular understanding of commerce, of the marketplace, of what we might call the fiqh of finance, the rulings and the wisdom that govern how people buy and sell and deal fairly with one another. This was not a small thing. The Prophet ﷺ himself trusted her judgment. He took her into his confidence and sought her advice in many matters, and especially in matters of money and the market, because she saw clearly where others did not. Think about that for a moment. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ, who received revelation from the heavens, still honored this woman by consulting her on the affairs in which Allah had given her understanding. Wisdom was wisdom, and he recognized it and drew it out.

Her literacy left a mark on the religion itself in a way she may never have fully seen. Among her closest companions in Madinah was Hafsa (may Allah be pleased with her), the daughter of Umar and a wife of the Prophet ﷺ, and a relative of Al-Shifa through their shared clan. Al-Shifa taught Hafsa to read. She taught her to write. She taught her calligraphy. And here is why that matters: when the Qur'an was gathered and preserved in written form, it was kept in the house of Hafsa. Some of the scholars connect this directly to her literacy, to the fact that she was among the few who could read and guard a written text. The skill that Al-Shifa passed on, letter by letter, became one of the threads in the preservation of the Book of Allah. A teacher rarely knows the full reach of what she plants.

The blanket she kept for the Prophet ﷺ

There is a detail from her life in Madinah that says more about love than any speech could. Because her home sat so near the center of things, the Prophet ﷺ would visit her family from time to time. And Al-Shifa lived in a state of anticipation, always waiting for the next visit, always hoping he would come again. So she prepared for him. She set aside a particular izar, a particular blanket, particular things kept ready and reserved for him alone, so that whenever the Messenger of Allah ﷺ entered her home, everything he might need was already there, cut and folded and waiting.

When he came, he would put on that garment, rest under that blanket, and take a nap in their home. Picture the honor of it: to host the Prophet ﷺ under your roof, to learn from him, to sit in his company, to have him sleep peacefully in your house because you had made it a place of rest for him. To us it would be the event of a lifetime, a moment never to be forgotten. To her it was something she longed to repeat, again and again, and so she kept everything ready in the hope that he would visit more often.

The truest measure of what those things meant to her came at the end of her life. When she died and left an inheritance, the most precious of all she left behind was not the wealth she had earned in Makkah, not what she had gathered in Madinah, not anything passed down from her husband. The most precious of her belongings were the clothes and the blankets and the simple things the Prophet ﷺ had used when he came to her home. She left these to her sons, Sulayman and Masruq, as the dearest part of her estate. A whole life of trade and learning and standing, and what she treasured above it all was a folded garment that had once warmed the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. That is where her heart was.

Teach her, as you taught her to write

There is a narration preserved by Abu Dawud that draws together the two halves of her life, the healer and the teacher, in a single scene. The Prophet ﷺ entered upon Al-Shifa while she was sitting with Hafsa, and he turned to her with a request. Will you not teach Hafsa, he said, the cure for ant bites and the infections that come from them, the same way you taught her how to read and how to write?

Al-Shifa knew medicine, and she knew a form of healing through ruqya, the recitation of words of remedy over the sick. The Prophet ﷺ permitted her to continue this healing, so long as it was grounded in what came from the Qur'an and the Sunnah and was kept clean of the practices of jahiliyya, the superstitions of the age before Islam. He did not ask her to abandon her craft. He purified it and blessed it and asked her to pass it on.

Notice the beauty of his request. He set her teaching of the written word and her teaching of healing side by side, as two gifts of equal worth, both of them things she possessed and others needed, both of them worth handing down. And notice who he asked her to teach: Hafsa, in whose home the Qur'an would be preserved. The same hands that Al-Shifa trained to write the letter would help guard the words of Allah, and now those same hands would carry the knowledge of healing too. She was a woman whose gifts kept multiplying through the people she taught.

A grandmother's memory, and the name of a Khalifah

The Prophet ﷺ passed from this world, and Al-Shifa kept her home and her place in the city. When Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) became the Khalifah, he honored the Sunnah

of the Prophet ﷺ in everything, including this: he continued to visit her house between the masjid and the market, just as he had seen the Messenger of Allah ﷺ do. He consulted her frequently on the affairs of the marketplace, on business and the rulings of trade, and some accounts say he formally placed her in charge of overseeing the market, though what is certain at the least is that the commander of the believers came to this woman's door for her counsel.

The most famous thing she ever narrated came out of one of those visits, and it concerns the very title by which Umar is remembered. When Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) had been the Khalifah, his name was simple: he was the successor to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. But you could not go on forever calling each new leader the successor of the successor of the successor. So when Umar took charge, there was a question in the air about what he should be called.

Al-Shifa was there for the answer, and she passed the story to her grandson, who passed it onward until it reached Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, the great-grandson of Umar himself. She said that Umar once wrote to his governor in Iraq, asking him to send two of his best men so that he could question them about Iraq and its people. The governor sent Labid ibn Rabia and Adi ibn Hatim (may Allah be pleased with them). When they arrived in Madinah, they entered the mosque and found Amr ibn al-As (may Allah be pleased with him), and they said to him, seek permission for us to enter upon Amir al-Mu'minin, the commander of the believers.

Amr was struck by the phrase. By Allah, he told them, you two have been granted success by Allah in the very name you have called him, for he is indeed the commander, and we are the believers. He went to Umar and greeted him with it: peace be

upon you, O commander of the believers. Umar asked him why he had said it, and Amr explained what the two men had called him. And from that day, this is the name Umar carried, Amir al-Mu'minin, the commander of the believers. It came to us through a quiet conversation between an elderly woman and her grandson, a memory she kept and chose to pass down, and now it belongs to the whole history of this ummah.

What she carried to the end

Al-Shifa's sons grew into men of substance under Umar. Masruq was appointed an amir, a man of knowledge and standing. Sulayman was a man of the Qur'an, a hafiz known for reciting through the long nights and leading the people in prayer. There is a story in him too. One morning Umar asked Al-Shifa why Sulayman had not been present at the Fajr prayer. She explained that her son had stood in prayer the whole night through and had fallen asleep only just before dawn, so he had missed praying Fajr in congregation. And Umar gave his famous reply: that to pray Fajr in congregation was more beloved to him than to stand the entire night alone. For the Prophet ﷺ had taught that whoever prays Isha in congregation, it is as if he has prayed half the night, and whoever prays Fajr in congregation, it is as if he has prayed the whole of it.

Al-Shifa lived to narrate other treasures as well. She is the one who reported that the Prophet ﷺ was asked what the best of deeds are, and he answered: belief in Allah, striving in His path, and an accepted Hajj. She narrated his words about the letter sent to the emperor of Persia. And like Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), she once described Umar himself, having seen some men walking slowly and learning they had been praying all night. She said of Umar that when he spoke, he made sure he

was heard; when he walked, he walked fast; when he gave, he gave generously; and when he struck, he struck hard.

The only line of her descendants that survived was through Sulayman, who had two sons, and he named them Abu Bakr and Uthman. So this early believer, this relative of Umar, became the grandmother of two boys carrying the names of two Khalifahs, and both of them grew up to be narrators of hadith. That is how some of her words reached us at all: a woman from the first years of Islam, her memory preserved through grandsons who loved the names of the righteous.

She died during the rule of Umar, leaving behind the hadiths recorded by Bukhari, by Abu Dawud, by an-Nasa'i. And Umar, the commander of the believers, the man she had advised and whose title she had carried into history, led the funeral prayer over this great woman, Al-Shifa bint Abdullah al-Adawiya. May Allah be pleased with her.

What Al-Shifa's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like hers and admire the skills: the literacy, the medicine, the calligraphy, the wisdom that drew kings of men to her door. Admiration is pleasant, and it costs nothing, and it changes nothing. Her life is asking for something harder than admiration. It is asking what we are doing with what Allah has given us.

She had been handed rare gifts, abilities that almost no one around her possessed. She could have hoarded them, traded on them, made herself important with them. Instead she gave them away. She taught what she knew, letter by letter, remedy by remedy, until her knowledge lived in other people and her students went on to guard the Book of Allah and heal the sick.

This is the question her life puts to you: whatever Allah has placed in your hands, your knowledge, your skill, your time, your understanding of something others find difficult, are you holding it for yourself, or are you spending it for Him by passing it on? Knowledge that is taught for the sake of Allah does not shrink when you give it away. It multiplies, and it keeps working long after you are gone, the way her teaching of Hafsa still echoes in every preserved page of the Qur'an. Teach one thing this week to someone who needs it, and intend it for Allah, and you have stepped onto her road.

Look, too, at where she kept her heart. She was a woman of property and learning, consulted by the powerful, honored by the Prophet ﷺ himself. And when her life was tallied at the end, the thing she treasured above every coin and every honor was a worn blanket the Messenger of Allah ﷺ had once slept under. Her love for him reordered what she valued. She measured wealth differently than the world did, because the nearness of the Prophet ﷺ, and through him the pleasure of Allah, was worth more to her than anything that could be bought. Ask yourself honestly what you treasure most, what you would name if your whole life were weighed today. Her life invites you to love Allah and His Messenger ﷺ so truly that it quietly rearranges everything else, until the things that bring you closer to Him outweigh the things the world tells you to want.

And there is a gentle mercy hidden in her story for the ordinary believer. She is not remembered for one dramatic moment. She is remembered for a steady, useful, faithful life: teaching, healing, advising, preparing a place of rest for the Prophet ﷺ, keeping the memories that others would need. Most of us will never have a single grand scene either. But we can have her kind of life, made of small acts of service done sincerely, day after day, for

the sake of Allah. The home set between the mosque and the marketplace is a picture of how faith is meant to be lived: not locked away from the world, but carried into it, so that worship and work and the service of people all flow from the same heart turned toward Allah.

So take one thing from Al-Shifa into your own days. Give away something you know, for His sake, expecting nothing back. Hold what draws you near to Allah dearer than what the world prizes. And serve quietly, faithfully, in the place where He has put you, trusting that nothing offered to Him is ever wasted. May Allah be pleased with Al-Shifa bint Abdullah, the healer and the teacher, and grant us a measure of her wisdom, her sincerity, and her love for His Messenger ﷺ, and gather us with the first believers who served Him with all they had.

This chapter follows the account of Al-Shifa bint Abdullah (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Mus'ab ibn Umayr

The Man Who Gave It All

There was a young man in Makkah whose perfume was so fine that the city wore it after him. Three or four days after he had passed through a place, the people there still knew he had come, because the scent lingered in the air, and they diluted their own perfumes to smell a little like him. They copied his clothes, his shoes, the way he carried himself. He was the most handsome man many of them had ever seen, the richest boy in Makkah, adored by a mother who could deny him nothing. And he gave every last piece of it away, walking out of his mother's house with not a single coin to his name, because he had found something worth more than all of it.

His name was Mus'ab ibn Umayr (may Allah be pleased with him), and his life is one long argument against the idea that a person needs to lose everything before turning to Allah. Mus'ab had lost nothing. His world was perfect, and he gave it up anyway.

The richest boy in Makkah

Mus'ab ibn Umayr ibn Hashim was born into Banu Abd al-Dar, one of the smallest tribes of Quraysh and one of the wealthiest, and he would become the richest among them. His father had died when Mus'ab was a child, leaving him an enormous inheritance. They said that if you weighed the wealth Mus'ab

inherited against the combined wealth of all Makkah, his share alone came to nearly half. He did not earn this fortune. He was raised inside it.

His mother, Khunas bint Malik, had only him. She never remarried and had no other children, and her entire life turned around her son. From the time he was small he wore gold bracelets and chains and garments of silk, the finest perfumes in the city, and clothes and even shoes cut to measure by a tailor brought from Yemen. He grew into a handsome, intelligent young man whom everyone wanted to be near, to dress like, to smell like.

That is a great deal of weight for a young heart, and most would have buckled under it into arrogance. Mus'ab's did not. You search the accounts of his early life and you do not find him striking a servant, humiliating a poor man, or sneering at anyone beneath him. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would later say that the best of people in the days of ignorance are the best of them in Islam. The luxury was around Mus'ab, but it had not rotted what was inside him.

A soft knock on the door of al-Arqam

Because Mus'ab was always surrounded by people, news reached him early. He heard about the house of al-Arqam, where a man named Muhammad ﷺ was quietly gathering a handful of followers and speaking to them of one God, of a Day of Judgement, of a hereafter. Barely more than a boy, Mus'ab was curious, and something in him wanted to see.

He went at night, in secret, so that his mother would not learn of it, because everything in his life ran back to her. The accounts describe him almost tiptoeing through the dark, knocking so softly he hoped no one would notice him arrive. When the door

opened, he found himself looking at the exact opposite of his own world. The people gathered around the Prophet ﷺ were slaves, the poor, the oppressed, men without tribe or standing. A mood passed through the room when this perfumed, silk-clad young man walked in. What was he doing here?

The Prophet ﷺ noticed him but did not stop. He was speaking of Paradise and the Fire, of the life to come, and he kept speaking. Mus'ab listened, asked a few questions, and in that single sitting he accepted Islam. He was told to keep it hidden, as the believers were doing then. So he became a quiet, regular student in the house of al-Arqam, sitting among those whom his society despised, learning from the Prophet ﷺ, memorising the Qur'an in a voice so beautiful that the companions loved to hear him recite it.

Tied up in the dark

He could not hide it forever. A man named Uthman ibn Talhah saw Mus'ab praying in secret near the Kaaba and carried the news straight to his mother. She refused to believe it. Not my son, she said. He tells me everything; he would have told me. They brought Mus'ab before his uncles and asked him directly whether he had left his religion for Muhammad ﷺ. Mus'ab did not lie. He said it was true.

His mother was overcome. She rushed at him to strike him, and could not. She had never hit her son in her life and did not know how, and her love stopped her hand in the air. So she screamed at him instead, and then she said the words that would shape the next chapter of his life: you will not leave this house until you renounce this religion. They tied him up in a corner of the home, in a kind of dungeon, and cut him off from the light of day. But she would not let anyone beat him.

So Mus'ab sat alone in the dark. No brother, no sister, no friend, nothing of the world he had owned. His whole identity had been wealth and beauty and the admiration of a city, all of it stripped away at once. This is what sets him apart from the other believers tortured in those years: they had never tasted the sweetness of this world the way Mus'ab had. A young man given everything and then deprived of it is exactly the kind you would expect to break quickly. He did not break. In that chamber he recited the Qur'an and prayed, and when his mother came to plead and to mock his new faith, he never raised his voice at her. He simply waited for Allah to make a way out.

Out with nothing

The way came. Mus'ab heard that the believers were being permitted to migrate to Abyssinia, al-Habasha, which tells you how early in Islam this was. He waited until his guard fell asleep, slipped out, and joined that first small band of migrants, leaving with nothing but the clothes on his back, the trendsetter of Makkah now a stranger in a land he had never seen.

In Abyssinia he slowly rebuilt a life, marrying Hamnah bint Jahsh, sister of Zaynab bint Jahsh, who would become a wife of the Prophet ﷺ. Then a rumour reached the migrants that the people of Makkah had embraced Islam, and Mus'ab was among those who returned on the strength of it, only to find it was not true.

When he reached Makkah, he went to the Prophet ﷺ before his own mother. And when he finally came to her, she was bitter with hurt: you come back from Abyssinia and go to Muhammad before you come to me? Mus'ab answered gently, but did not soften the truth. The love of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, my mother, is greater than my love for you. You brought me out of your womb into this world, and Allah, through him, brought me from darkness

into light. He never threw the imprisonment in her face. But he would not pretend that anyone stood above the one who had given him guidance.

She tried everything. She offered him his wealth back, his clothes, his status, a mother's full forgiveness, if only he would return to the old ways. He answered by inviting her instead: you come to Allah, and He will forgive you and grant you Paradise. She threatened to cut him off from every dirham he was due to inherit. He said he was content, that what Allah has is better. She threatened to imprison him again, and this time his answer had an edge: if you do, no guard will last a day or a night with me; this time I will fight. In the end he told her, with real pain, that they should leave each other in peace; he would still honour her, but he would not be turned.

She told him to leave behind every garment and coin. He told her to take it all; he wanted nothing. And the boy destined to be the richest man in Makkah walked out of that house without a single dirham to his name. His mother would die in disbelief, and that grief stayed with him. But he did not buy back her approval with his religion. Sit for a moment with the will that took, in a spoiled child, to walk away from everything he had ever known.

The man sent to a city

Reduced now to the level of the poor and the tribeless he had once sat beside in al-Arqam, Mus'ab was content. He stayed close to the Prophet ﷺ, a devoted student, quick to memorise the Qur'an as it came, and the companions, who all knew what he had given up, loved to pray behind him for the beauty of his recitation.

In the eleventh year after revelation, during the Hajj season, the Prophet ﷺ was meeting groups of pilgrims by night and calling them to Islam. Among them were six young men from a city called Yathrib, men in their twenties and barely thirty, whose fathers had killed one another off in long tribal wars, with no real power in their region. The Prophet ﷺ spared no one his call. He sat with these six, recited to them, and they accepted Islam. They asked him to send someone back to teach their people, and he chose Mus'ab, sending him that same season to walk into a strange and unstable city, a place of armed camps where one wrong step could be fatal. The next time the Prophet ﷺ would see Mus'ab was a full year later, at the following Hajj. For that entire year Mus'ab was the imam of the believers in a city that was not his, the lone teacher of Islam in a place where he had no tribe and no protector.

One scene from those days captures the whole man. As Mus'ab sat teaching a small gathering, a powerful, angry chief named Usayd ibn Hudayr came striding toward him with a spear, demanding to know what he was doing among his people and telling him to leave or face the weapon. Mus'ab did not flinch. Calmly, with a smile, he made him an offer: sit and listen, and if you do not like what I say, I will get up and leave, and you will never see me again. The man's anger could not find anything to grip. He set down his spear and sat. Mus'ab recited from Surah al-A'la and told him the basics of the faith, and by the time he finished, the chief said, how beautiful this is; how do I enter your way? Mus'ab told him to wash, put on clean clothes, and bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.

The chief did exactly that, and then said: there is a man whose people will all follow him if he accepts this. He brought Mus'ab to

Sa'd ibn Mu'adh, a leader of his people, and Sa'd, his heart open, accepted Islam the same way, and then a third leader, Sa'd ibn Ubadah. In a matter of moments the most powerful men in Yathrib had become believers. Sa'd ibn Mu'adh gathered his tribe, announced that he would have nothing more to do with any of them until they believed in the one God as he did, and pointed them to Mus'ab. They surrounded him, and one by one they entered Islam until, by nightfall, this stranger had brought a few hundred new believers to faith.

This is the lesson Mus'ab leaves with anyone who carries the name of a believer before others. He did not make the people of Yathrib merely Muslim; he made them love the Prophet ﷺ before they had ever met him, tracing everything back to the one who had sent him. When the believers of that city finally streamed into the streets crying out that the Messenger of Allah had come, it was because of what they had already seen of him in Mus'ab. He returned to that Hajj with about seventy of them, who pledged themselves to the Prophet ﷺ at al-Aqabah, the pledge that would open the door of the migration.

The flag that would not fall

There is a narration that Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) was sitting with the Prophet ﷺ when Mus'ab approached wearing a single coarse cloth, patched all over, the only garment he owned. The Prophet ﷺ wept at the sight of him, remembering the blessing Mus'ab had once lived in and seeing what he had now. Then he spoke to the nation that would come after, of a day when believers would have a fine set of clothes to wake in and another to sleep in, meal after meal set before them, their houses draped the way the Kaaba is draped. He was describing wealth that would one day come to the ummah while

looking at Mus'ab, who would never see any of it again. Asked whether they were better off then or in that future age, the Prophet ﷺ told them they were better now, in their hardship and devotion, than they would be in the days of ease.

At Badr, the Prophet ﷺ gave Mus'ab the honour of carrying the standard, a role given only to those who hold an army's morale in their hands, and he gave it to him again at Uhud. There, when the archers abandoned their post for fear of missing the spoils and the enemy swept back around into the Muslims, Mus'ab saw the attackers driving toward the Prophet ﷺ himself, knowing that to kill him would end everything. So he took his horse and the flag and rode deliberately away from the Prophet ﷺ, to draw the danger onto himself, raising the banner high and crying out the greatness of Allah, making himself the loudest thing on that field so the enemy would come for him and the Prophet ﷺ might be carried to safety.

A cruel man named Abdullah ibn Qami'ah came at him and struck off his right hand, the hand that held the flag. Mus'ab caught the banner with his left and went on calling out the greatness of Allah, until his left hand too was severed. Then he gathered what was left of his arms and held the flag against his body. As he held it, he recited a verse not long before revealed:

Muhammad is only a messenger before whom many messengers have been and gone. If he died or was killed, would you revert to your old ways? If anyone did so, he would not harm God in the least. God will reward the grateful.

QUR'AN 3:144

He was telling the believers that even if the Prophet ﷺ were to fall, they must not turn back. A spear came through his chest and

killed him. His body carried more than seventy wounds. He so resembled the Prophet ﷺ that some who saw him fall thought, in their grief, that it was the Prophet himself.

When the burials came, there was not enough cloth to shroud him. Khabbab (may Allah be pleased with him) remembered that when they covered Mus'ab's head, his feet showed, and when they covered his feet, his head showed. A man who had once nearly owned Makkah did not have a cloth long enough to cover his body in death. They covered his head and laid grass over his feet, and the Prophet ﷺ recited over him:

There are men among the believers who honoured their pledge to God: some of them have fulfilled it by death, and some are still waiting. They have not changed in the least.

QUR'AN 33:23

And he bore witness that Mus'ab and the martyrs around him were the martyrs of Allah on the Day of Resurrection. Then he told the people to visit them often and give them salaam, promising that no Muslim would greet them until that Day except that they would return the greeting. Mus'ab was buried beside Hamza, the Prophet's beloved uncle. The two had embraced Islam in the same house of al-Arqam, and now they lay side by side at Uhud.

What Mus'ab's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel only wonder, and leave it there. But Mus'ab did not give up his fortune so we could admire him. His life is a question laid against our own faith.

He let go of the world while it was still in his hands. Most of us imagine we will turn fully to Allah later, once the shine of this life

has worn off, once our youth is spent. Mus'ab had no disappointment to push him. His world was flawless, and he walked out of it because he had weighed it against what Allah was offering and found it light. That is the heart of faith: to believe in Allah's promise before you have collected on it, to trade the certain comfort in your grip for a reward you cannot yet see. Years later the Prophet ﷺ recited over his fallen companions a verse about a different kind of trade, one the whole ummah is invited into:

God has purchased the persons and possessions of the believers in return for the Garden- they fight in God's way: they kill and are killed- this is a true promise given by Him in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran. Who could be more faithful to his promise than God? So be happy with the bargain you have made: that is the supreme triumph.

QUR'AN 9:111

Mus'ab made that bargain in full. He sold everything and took nothing back. And here is what should reach into an ordinary life today. You will likely never be asked to give a fortune or carry a flag until your hands are cut away. But you will be asked, again and again, to give up something small for the sake of Allah: a friendship pulling you away from Him, an income you cannot keep clean, an hour of comfort you could spend in prayer. A faith that costs you nothing is a faith you have not yet tested, and Mus'ab is the proof that the cost is worth it. Sincerity, ikhlas, runs through all of it: he taught a whole city to love Allah and His Messenger ﷺ and pointed every bit of that love away from himself; he carried the standard not for glory but to shield the Prophet ﷺ; and he died with no one watching but Allah, and that was enough for him.

Think of what his patience won. When ease finally came to the companions, men on opposite ends of every experience wept at his memory. Khabbab, tortured in Makkah, feared his own reward had been hastened into this world while Mus'ab's was kept whole for the next. Abdur-Rahman ibn Awf, surrounded by his wealth, set down his food and cried that Mus'ab was better than him and had died without even a shroud. The tortured and the rich agreed: Mus'ab had been the best of them, and Allah had kept for him something far greater than anything he gave up. Imagine, the scholars said, a man meeting Allah with the whole city of the Prophet ﷺ in his scale, every soul who ever loved it weighing in his favour because he was sent to open it.

So take one thing from Mus'ab into your week. Give up one small thing for Allah that no one will ever know you surrendered. Let go of something you are gripping out of fear, and trust that what He has is better, the way Mus'ab said it plainly to his own mother. What you give to Allah, He keeps. What the world calls loss, He may be recording as the very thing that saves you. May Allah be pleased with Mus'ab ibn Umayr, gather us with those we love, and grant us a measure of the heart that could hold the whole world and let it go.

This chapter follows the account of Mus'ab ibn Umayr (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (3:144, 33:23, 9:111). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum

The One on Whose Behalf Allah Admonished His Prophet

Most people know him through a single moment. A frown. A turning away. Sixteen verses of Qur'an sent down from above the seven heavens because a blind man came running, calling out, asking to be taught. It is one of the most famous incidents in the entire Makkan period, and it is almost the only thing that comes to mind when his name is spoken.

But that is a thin reading of a wide life. The man at the center of that moment had a long and extraordinary biography beside the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ: an early believer, a teacher of the Qur'an, an appointed leader over the city of Madinah, the second voice to call the people to prayer, and at the end, an old man with his feet planted in the soil of a battlefield, clutching a banner to his chest. His name was Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum (may Allah be pleased with him), and to understand why Allah honored him the way He did, you have to meet him before the frown and stay with him long after.

A man of good lineage and no vision

There is a tendency to imagine him as one of the oppressed and lowly of Makkah, like Bilal or Ammar or Khabbab, persecuted and tortured for his faith. He was not. Abdullah came from good standing by the measure of Quraysh. His lineage was noble on both sides, and we know of no persecution that touched him in

Makkah. It may have been sympathy for his condition, or the protection of his status, or both together, but he escaped the torture that broke the bodies of so many early believers.

His name before Islam was, by one report, al-Husayn, and the Prophet ﷺ changed it to Abdullah, the servant of Allah. He is referred to by his mother, Umm Maktum, and there is meaning buried in the name. He was, the biographers say, the only companion of the Prophet ﷺ whom we know to have been born blind. Others among the Sahaba lost their sight in old age, that was common, but he never saw the world at all. His vision was concealed from him from the first day of his life. The word maktum carries that very sense: concealed, hidden away. So his mother was called the mother of the one whose sight was hidden, an expression of tenderness toward her and toward the child who could not see.

And here is something to hold onto from the very start, because his whole life turns on it: you cannot tell, when a name is given, how it will unfold. A name given in sympathy for a boy who could not see the world would one day belong to a man whose heart saw more than the seeing.

He was also, by blood, close to the household of the Prophet ﷺ before there was any household of faith. He was the first cousin of Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her). His father's sister was Khadijah's mother. That closeness very likely let him know, early and quietly, that her husband had begun to call people to one God. He had already watched the character of this noble man for years. The idea of pure monotheism resonated with what he already knew of him. So when the call came, Abdullah did not need to be argued into it. He said, simply, that he believed in the religion of this trustworthy man. He was among the very earliest

to accept Islam, from before the believers ever gathered in the house of al-Arqam.

The frown, and the verses that followed

The one Makkan story we have of him is the one he is known for. The Prophet ﷺ was working to reach the nobles of Quraysh. This was not vanity and it was not a betrayal of the weak. He understood that if the powerful men of the city accepted Islam, the early Muslims would be able to worship more freely, and others would follow, whether out of tribal loyalty or out of deference to standing. He had seen what the conversion of strong men could do.

So when the leaders of Quraysh finally agreed to give him a hearing, he went and sat with them. The gathering is named in the books: Utbah ibn Rabi'ah and his brother Shaybah, Umayyah ibn Khalaf, who would later own and torture Bilal, Abu Jahl, and al-Walid ibn al-Mughirah, the man who mocked the revelation itself and boasted that he could tell the same old tales and buy his way out of any hell. These were the men sitting before the Prophet ﷺ, seeming, at last, to lend him an ear.

It was into this gathering that Abdullah came running. He could not see who else was there. He only knew that the Prophet ﷺ had made himself completely available to him, that this was simply the nature of their bond. Abdullah would come out looking for him, find him, put his hands on him, and the Prophet ﷺ would speak with him for as long as he wished. So Abdullah raised his voice and called, "O Muhammad, teach me from what Allah has taught you. Bring me close to you, sit me close, so I can listen." He had no idea he was interrupting anything, and no idea what it meant that, at that moment, the men the Prophet ﷺ most hoped to reach were watching.

The Prophet ﷺ did not push him away. He did not tell him to leave or that he was busy. He drew his eyebrows together in a flicker of displeasure, turned slightly from him, and continued speaking to the five men. Abdullah, who could not see, knew nothing of the frown. But the men of Quraysh saw it.

Allah did not let it pass. He did not send Jibril with a private instruction. He sent down verses to be recited until the end of time, sixteen of them, opening with a rebuke:

He frowned and turned away when the blind man came to him - > for all you know, he might have grown in spirit, or taken note of something useful to him. For the self-satisfied one you go out of your way - > though you are not to be blamed for his lack of spiritual growth - > but from the one who has come to you full of eagerness and awe you allow yourself to be distracted.

QUR'AN 80:1-10

Consider the scale of it. When the honor of Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) was defended, ten verses came down. For this man, sixteen. It shows the standard to which Allah held His Messenger ﷺ. And it was never meant to humiliate the Prophet ﷺ. It was an honor to him, that his Lord taught him so directly, and through him taught the whole ummah. A paradigm had to shift. The way we look at people had to change. The self-satisfied man who feels no need for guidance, even when he listens politely, is not more worthy of your attention than the poor believer who runs to you trembling with eagerness and awe of God.

The verses ended by lifting the revelation itself far above the petty calculus of pleasing the powerful:

No indeed! This [Quran] is a lesson from which those who wish to be taught should learn, [written] on honoured, exalted, pure pages, by the hands of noble and virtuous scribes.

QUR'AN 80:11-16

These are words too elevated to be lowered in order to court men who feel no need for them. You call everyone to Allah, the famous and the unknown, the rich and the poor. But you do not bend the message out of its shape to win anyone. That is the line between calling people and betraying the call.

There is a quiet justice in the names of those five men. Every one of them who lived to see it was killed at Badr, fighting against the Prophet ﷺ. Umayyah was killed by Bilal, the slave he had tortured. The only one who escaped that fate, al-Walid, died before the migration, still in his disbelief. Allah humbled the men the world exalted, and exalted the man the world overlooked.

And how did the Prophet ﷺ treat Abdullah afterward? He did not hold the incident against him, as if the blind man had gotten him into trouble. The opposite. Every time he saw him after that, the Prophet ﷺ would rise to greet him and say, "Welcome to the one on whose behalf my Lord admonished me." You must be a special person, the gesture said, for Allah to reveal Qur'an for your sake.

The teacher sent ahead

When the seerah moves to Madinah, Abdullah moves to the very front of it. Before the Prophet ﷺ himself migrated, he sent two men ahead to the city to prepare its hearts: Musab ibn Umayr and Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum. The people of Madinah remembered it plainly. These were the first two to come to them from Makkah,

and what were they doing? They were teaching the people the Qur'an. While the believers of Madinah waited for the Prophet ﷺ to arrive, these two men went from household to household, teaching the verses that were still being revealed.

So Abdullah, the blind man, was the second person to make the hijrah, and one of the first two teachers of the Qur'an in the city that would become the home of Islam. He had no sight, and he was entrusted with the light.

"O Allah, reveal my excuse"

Then came Badr, and with it his first taste of being left behind. He longed to go out and strive alongside the Prophet ﷺ, but he was not placed in that position, and it grieved him. This is the mark of a heart full of awe of Allah: it does not go hunting for excuses to be released from duty. It looks for ways to do more than is required, out of love. The way some long to fast a Ramadan their health will not allow, or to stand in a prayer their bodies can barely bear, Abdullah longed to carry a weight that had not been placed on him.

He began to make a particular supplication. "O Allah, reveal my excuse." He had already heard Qur'an come down for his sake once. Now he wanted to hear himself again in the words of his Lord, to know where he stood in a situation that was uniquely his.

His answer came through a verse. He was present once when revelation descended upon the Prophet ﷺ. Zayd ibn Thabit, one of the scribes, has described what those moments were like: the weight of revelation was so heavy that a thigh resting beneath the Prophet's leg felt as if it would be crushed. On that occasion the Prophet ﷺ called for a bone, a shoulder blade, to write upon, and the words that came were these:

Those believers who stay at home, apart from those with an incapacity, are not equal to those who commit themselves and their possessions to striving in God's way. God has raised such people to a rank above those who stay at home- although He has promised all believers a good reward, those who strive are favoured with a tremendous reward above those who stay at home-

QUR'AN 4:95

When Abdullah heard the first part of it, "those who stay at home are not equal to those who strive," it cut him. So I am left out again, he thought. He called out, "O Messenger of Allah, what do you command me to do? I cannot see." And the narrations describe the revelation taking hold of the Prophet ﷺ a second time, there and then, and when it lifted, the verse carried a phrase it had not carried a moment before: apart from those with an incapacity. Allah had answered his supplication inside the verse itself. Abdullah held those few words close for the rest of his life. He was not counted among those who stayed behind. Not in any way at all.

The blind man who called the city to prayer

In Madinah his standing only rose. The Prophet ﷺ had two muadhhdhins, two men appointed to call the people to prayer. One was Bilal. The other was Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum.

Look at the pairing, because nothing in it is accidental. The most prominent caller was Bilal, a man who in the age of ignorance had been pushed to the very bottom for the color of his skin and his lack of a tribe, now lifted to call an entire city to the worship of God. The second was Abdullah, the only companion born blind, a man the people of ignorance would have looked past.

Allah associates no partner with Himself, and He raised them both.

The arrangement around the dawn prayer made the honor unmistakable. Bilal would give a call in the night so that those intending to fast could eat and drink, and the people were told to keep eating until they heard the call of Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum, which marked the true dawn. But the break of dawn is something you see in the sky. How would a blind man know when it had come? He could not. So someone would go to him and tell him, "It is dawn, it is dawn, now call," and only then would he raise his voice. The Prophet ﷺ could have simply let Bilal call both. Instead he built into the daily rhythm of the city an honoring of this man, a standing arrangement that the whole community lived by.

And there is something tender hidden in the definition of a companion. A Sahabi, strictly, is one who saw the Prophet ﷺ and believed in him. Abdullah believed, loved him, adored him, gave everything for him, and never once saw his face in this life. He knew the Prophet ﷺ by his presence and his voice and never by sight. That is why the books that define a companion add a quiet clause at the bottom of the page: for some, it was not seeing with the eye but being in his presence and affirming him. The man who could not see the sun was chosen to announce its dawn. The man who could not see the Prophet ﷺ was raised in his very presence.

The honors continued. The Prophet ﷺ appointed Abdullah to lead the people in prayer, at a time when many assumed a blind man could not. And on no fewer than thirteen occasions, when the Prophet ﷺ left Madinah, he placed Abdullah in charge of the city. Not as a symbol. As its actual authority while he was gone.

This blind man, whom no one in the days of ignorance would have followed, governed the city of the Prophet ﷺ in his absence, and led its people in prayer when he was present. The scholars of hadith took rulings from his life: that a blind man may lead, that a person with a disability may hold a position of leadership.

Honored by the household, decades on

His honor outlived the Prophet ﷺ himself. Years after the Prophet ﷺ had passed, a student of Aisha named Masruq came to visit her and found her serving a blind man who was wrapped in his garment. She was cutting citrus fruit for him with her own hands and preparing honey, attending to him, honoring him in a way Masruq had never seen. He was stunned. "O Mother of the Believers," he asked, "who is this man, that you serve him like this?"

She answered, "This is the one on whose behalf Allah admonished His Prophet ﷺ." Then she told him the whole story of the frowning, and added, "And this is how the family of the Prophet ﷺ has been ordered to treat him ever since." The instruction had been passed down through the household like an inheritance. When Abdullah came near, they knew, he was to be honored, because Allah had honored him. A man whom revelation singled out was still being served by the family of the Prophet ﷺ decades after that revelation came down.

The banner at al-Qadisiyyah

Everything he had been kept from in his youth came to him at the end. In the years after the Prophet ﷺ passed, under the leadership of Umar ibn al-Khattab, the Muslims faced the Persian Empire in a decisive confrontation at al-Qadisiyyah. The Persians

had massed an army of more than a hundred thousand to wipe the Muslims off the earth once and for all. A call went out across the ummah for fighters, voluntary but urgent, to stand against that force.

In Madinah, Abdullah, now an old man, came forward. He was asked, in effect, what could he possibly do? He said, "Let me go. I will recite the Qur'an to the people and pray with them in the nights." Before the battle, the Muslims did not sleep; they spent the nights in prayer. He had been the first, beside Musab, to teach Madinah the Qur'an, and he would do it again on the road to war.

When the armies met, perhaps thirty thousand Muslims faced over a hundred thousand Persians, who sent out war elephants to trample men to death. There at the front, Abdullah asked for something more. "Do you not need someone to carry the banner?" The flag bearer was always at the heart of the battle. They warned him that he would not be able to defend himself. He answered that he would wear his armor and hold the flag. And so they let him. The narrations say that to keep the winds of war from knocking him back, since he could not see to brace himself, he planted his feet firmly into the ground so that he could not move. An old, blind companion, one of the first to enter Islam, stood in the middle of that violence covered in armor, his feet buried in the earth, holding the banner of the Prophet ﷺ so that it would not fall.

The battle raged three days. Of the thirty thousand Muslims, around eight thousand five hundred were killed; more than forty thousand Persians fell. It opened the road that would end the Persian Empire. And when the fighting was over and they went to

count the fallen, they found Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum lying among the martyrs, the flag still clutched against his chest.

The man who used to call the city to a dawn he could not see had carried, into the heart of a war he could not see, the banner of the one he loved. The eyes were never the thing that was blind. It is the hearts that go blind, and his heart saw clearly to the very end.

What Abdullah's life asks of our faith

It is easy to remember Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum as the lesson in a famous story about kindness to the overlooked. That is true, and it is real, but it is not the whole of what his life asks of us. The deeper question is not how we treat people. It is what we want from Allah, and how badly.

Here was a man with every excuse the world recognizes. He was blind from birth. He could not see a battlefield, could not defend himself, could not even tell when dawn had broken. No one would have faulted him for staying home, for staying safe, for receiving honor passively. And Allah Himself had carved out his excuse in the words of the Qur'an: apart from those with an incapacity. He was released, by name, by his Lord. Most of us, given a fraction of that exemption, would take it gladly and call it a mercy.

He did the opposite. He spent his life trying to do more than was required of him, because what moved him was not duty but love, and love does not look for the exit. He begged Allah to let him be counted among the strivers. He stood for the prayers when he could have sat. He planted his feet in the soil of al-Qadisiyyah when he could have stayed in his bed in Madinah. This is the quality to take from him into an ordinary life: not the ability to do

great things, but the refusal to do the least. Ask yourself, honestly, how often you reach for the lighter ruling, the permitted excuse, the easy way out, and how it would change you to instead ask, "What more can I do for Allah, even though I do not have to?"

And notice what he wanted when he wanted his excuse revealed. He did not want to be released. He wanted to know his standing with Allah. He had already tasted what it was to have Qur'an come down for his sake, and once a heart has tasted nearness to Allah, nothing else satisfies it. That is khashyah, the awe of God that the Qur'an names as the fruit of true knowledge. It is not fear that paralyzes; it is awe that drives a man toward his Lord. The seeing men of Quraysh sat politely and felt no need. The blind man ran trembling, because he felt his entire akhirah hanging on what he might learn. We were never told what he came to ask that day. It did not matter. What mattered was the urgency, the sense that nothing in this world was as pressing as his standing before God. When did you last feel that about a single act of worship?

His life also quietly dismantles every excuse we make from our limitations. He could not see, and Allah made him a teacher of the Qur'an, a caller to prayer, a governor of the city, and a martyr with the flag in his hands. The thing the world counted as his disqualification became the very stage on which Allah displayed his honor. Whatever you think disqualifies you from serving Allah, your weakness, your circumstance, your lack of standing, His honoring does not run on the world's accounting. He raised a blind man above the chiefs of Quraysh, and He is able to raise you from wherever you imagine you are stuck.

So take one concrete thing from him today, and do it for Allah. Find one act of worship you have been excusing yourself from, and do it anyway, not because you must, but because you love Him and want more of Him. Run toward Him with a little of Abdullah's urgency, as though your nearness to Him were the only thing that mattered, because in truth it is. And when the world overlooks what you give, remember that Allah does not overlook it, and that He has been known to send down honor for the ones the world walked past. May Allah be pleased with Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum, the martyr who could not see and yet saw further than the seeing, and may He grant us a measure of the heart that ran toward Him and never looked for a way out.

This chapter follows the account of Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (80:1-16, 4:95). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abu Jandal, Abdullah, and Suhayl ibn Amr

The Family That Came Home

There is a kind of story that does not move in a straight line. It doubles back, it switches sides, it breaks your heart in one scene and mends it in another, and only at the very end do you see that a single hand was guiding all of it from the start. This is that kind of story. It is not the story of one companion but of one family: a father who held out against Islam longer than almost anyone alive, and the children he tortured for entering it, all of them ending in the same place, fighting side by side for the sake of Allah.

To understand it, you have to begin on a night in the dark valleys of Makkah, when nobody yet knew who could be trusted.

Two hearts in the dark

In the earliest years, when belief was a secret a person carried at the risk of his life, the Muslims of Makkah were still learning to read one another. Who was hiding their faith? Who was open about it? Who was a danger? One night a young man named Abdullah ibn Suhayl (may Allah be pleased with him) went out into the valley, looking up at the stars, trying to breathe past something pressing on his chest. And there in the darkness he met Umar, who in those days had not yet accepted Islam.

They circled each other warily, each asking what had brought him out at such an hour. Then Abdullah, still not naming it directly, asked a strange and searching question. Could a man live with two hearts: one he keeps for his family and his people, and another for what he truly feels inside? Should a person obey his fathers and deny what his own heart knows? Umar understood at once. "Is it Islam," he asked, "that is causing you this confusion?" And then Umar, of all people, helped Abdullah decide. If it is Islam, he said, then follow it and bear the consequences, and I will respect you even as your enemy. But if you turn coward and choose safety over what you know is right, you will be small in my eyes. Follow your conscience.

Abdullah went home to his father with that advice still ringing in him, and his father was no ordinary man. Suhayl ibn Amr was the chief orator of Quraysh, the most eloquent tongue in the city, its negotiator, admired by every tribe, a man with a great deal to lose if Islam was true. Abdullah, only about sixteen when revelation began, came to him with a question shaped like his father's own wisdom. Would you rather have a two-faced son? Of course not, said Suhayl. Then would you rather have a son who is a loyal coward, or a courageous opponent? Suhayl, caught in his son's logic, answered that he would prefer the courageous opponent, though he wished his son could be loyal and courageous at once.

So Abdullah told him plainly: I have followed the religion of Muhammad ﷺ, and I have rejected your idols. The threats came one after another. I will kill you. I will let you inherit nothing, and I am the richest man in Quraysh. I will imprison you for life. To each one Abdullah answered without flinching: you will not kill me; what is with Allah is better and everlasting; you will imprison me neither in body nor in mind. In the end Suhayl threw him out and disowned him, still secretly hoping his son would come back.

A house emptying around one man

Abdullah was the older brother. The younger was Abu Jandal (may Allah be pleased with him), little more than a boy when the message came, who looked up to Abdullah and quietly followed him into Islam, hiding it even from his father. And it did not stop with the two sons. Two sisters became Muslim and migrated to Abyssinia, one of them Sahla, the wife of Abu Hudhayfah. The brothers of Suhayl embraced Islam too, one of them, Sakran, the first husband of the woman who would later become the Prophet's wife Sawda (may Allah be pleased with her). One after another the family of Suhayl ibn Amr turned toward the Prophet ﷺ, and many fled the persecution to Abyssinia with their spouses to save their faith.

And in the middle of it stood Suhayl, alone. His children believed, his brothers believed, his in-laws believed. He had been given every possible doorway into Islam, and refused to walk through any of them. The reason was not that he had not heard the truth. It was that he was the pride of Quraysh, their spokesman, the keeper of their unity, and his tribalism had grown stronger than his faith and even stronger than his love for his own household. His insistence on the ways of ignorance was, in part, the very thing persecuting his children.

When the rumor reached Abyssinia that Makkah had accepted Islam, Abdullah returned home, only to find it false. This time his father did not let him go. Suhayl seized him and made good at last on his old threat, imprisoning and torturing his own son, making an example of him before the younger boy, Abu Jandal, who still had not confessed his own faith. Under that torture Abdullah pretended to renounce Islam, and so was released, and went on quietly aiding the cause of the Prophet ﷺ while wearing the mask of a man who had given up.

Badr, and a son who crossed the lines

When the Prophet ﷺ tried to return to Makkah after the cruelty he suffered at Ta'if, he sent Bilal seeking protection, and Suhayl was among those approached. He could have answered with contempt. Instead he sent a courteous message back: if it were up to me I would let you in, but my clan and yours do not intersect in a way that lets me meaningfully protect you. He did not spit, he did not gloat; he held a strange dignity even in his refusal, and the Prophet ﷺ noticed it.

Then came the migration to Madinah, and then Badr. Suhayl went out to fight, pushed along with the other chiefs by Abu Jahl, and he took his son Abdullah with him, believing Abdullah had abandoned Islam years before. But as the two armies drew close, in the night, Abdullah slipped away from his father and ran to the Muslims. Think of what that took. The Muslims were outnumbered and expected to be slaughtered, and not one of them fled back to his family. Yet Abdullah, alone, defected from the disbelievers to stand and fight beside the Prophet ﷺ.

His father was captured at Badr. Umar had no love for Suhayl, the insider whose tongue could cut alliances out from under the Muslims and isolate the Prophet ﷺ. So Umar came with a plan. Let me knock his teeth out, he said, so that his tongue lolls out for the rest of his life and he can never again use his eloquence against you. The Prophet ﷺ refused twice over. First: I will not mutilate him, lest Allah mutilate me. We do not mutilate our captives. And then the words that would not make sense for years to come: leave his mouth, for it may be that one day this mouth will please you, and Suhayl may take a stance that you would envy him over. No one else saw anything in Suhayl. The Prophet ﷺ saw what was not yet visible to a single human eye.

Suhayl was ransomed like the other captives, a man of his own tribe taking his place in captivity while he went to fetch his wealth from Makkah, returned, and paid it. Nobility and obstinacy lived in him side by side.

The hardest day at Hdaybiyyah

Years passed. At some point Suhayl discovered that his younger son, Abu Jandal, was a Muslim too, and did to him exactly what he had done to Abdullah: he locked him in a chamber in his own house and tortured him. But Abu Jandal had no one. He had never grown up around the Prophet ﷺ, never had his older brother near. He was a young man wasting away in a cell in Makkah while Abdullah lived in Madinah as an honored companion.

Then the Prophet ﷺ set out with the believers for the lesser pilgrimage, and at Hdaybiyyah a treaty was negotiated. The man Quraysh sent was Suhayl. The Prophet ﷺ, who loved a good omen, heard the name, which means ease, and told his companions that their affair had now been made easy. Suhayl drove a hard bargain. The Muslims would turn back this year and come the next, staying only three days, carrying only sheathed swords. And the cruelest clause: if anyone fled from Quraysh to the Muslims, the Muslims must return him, but if a Muslim fled to Quraysh, he would not be returned. As the document was written, Suhayl objected even to the words. Not "In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious," but simply "In Your name, O Allah." Not "Muhammad the Messenger of Allah," for if we believed that we would not be fighting you, but "Muhammad son of Abdullah." The Prophet ﷺ erased the title with his own hand.

The believers were already burning inside. They had set out for the Sacred House and could not enter, they had erased the word

Messenger, they had accepted terms that felt like humiliation. And then, into the middle of all this, came the scene the companions would speak of for the rest of their lives.

Abu Jandal had escaped his father's chamber and crossed more than a hundred miles, chains still on his hands and feet, his body covered in wounds, his hair and beard wild, dragging himself toward Hudaybiyyah. One of the companions said they had never seen a sight like it. He came stumbling toward the Muslims, crying out, "O Muslims! Help me! Save me!" The ink on the treaty was barely dry. And Suhayl saw his son, slapped him, seized him by the iron collar at his neck, and said: this is the first one. You return him to me under our agreement.

Every heart among the believers wanted to tear the treaty apart and save the boy. The Prophet ﷺ pleaded with Suhayl: give me this one, just him, the treaty is not even finished. Suhayl refused. No, this is the first, and I will not let him go. And Abu Jandal, dragged away, stopped calling to the Prophet ﷺ and began calling to the believers themselves: O Muslims, you are returning me to the disbelievers, and I came to you as a Muslim. Do you not see what they did to me?

There was nothing the Prophet ﷺ could do but honor his word. He went close to Abu Jandal and said only what he had once said to the tortured in Makkah: be patient, and seek your reward from Allah, for Allah will make for you a way out. One companion later confessed that this was the single moment in his life when he felt he might disobey the Prophet ﷺ. And yet the Prophet ﷺ submitted to the decree, and Abu Jandal was carried back into captivity, screaming, while the believers watched and could not understand why no one was saving him.

This was the test. It tested every Muslim there: are we truly on the truth, and is this truly how it ends? But more than anyone, it tested Abu Jandal. He could have gone home and told his father he had been right all along. He did not. He held to his faith. That is certainty.

The road that came back around

The story did not end at Hdaybiyyah; it turned. Soon another believer, Abu Basir (may Allah be pleased with him), escaped Makkah to Madinah, and under the treaty the Prophet ﷺ handed him back to the men sent to collect him. On the road Abu Basir killed one of his captors and the other fled. Unable to keep him in Madinah without breaking the treaty, the Prophet ﷺ let him go to the coast, and Abu Jandal escaped again and joined him. Together they gathered other Muslim fugitives until they were a band of more than seventy, camped along the trade road between Makkah and Syria, crushing the caravans of Quraysh.

It worked so well that Quraysh themselves begged the Prophet ﷺ to take the very clause back: send for these men, only stop them strangling our trade. So the clause that had broken the believers' hearts was struck out by the hands that had insisted on it, and the two brothers, Abdullah and Abu Jandal, were finally reunited among the believers in Madinah.

Then came the conquest of Makkah. Suhayl was still holding out, one of a handful not covered by the general amnesty. He sent his son Abdullah to plead for him, and the Prophet ﷺ granted him safety. His sons called him to Islam, and still he refused. Only at the Kaaba itself, when the Prophet ﷺ asked what they expected of him and Suhayl answered, a noble brother and the son of a noble brother, did the moment come. The Prophet ﷺ answered

them with the words of a prophet to the brothers who had wronged him:

but he said, 'You will hear no reproaches today. May God forgive you: He is the Most Merciful of the merciful.

QUR'AN 12:92

At those words, Suhayl ibn Amr (may Allah be pleased with him) finally became Muslim.

A life of redemption

He belonged now to the last of all to believe, the ones whose hearts the Prophet ﷺ softened with gifts of camels after Hunayn, while the Helpers asked for nothing but the Prophet ﷺ himself. The Qur'an does not pretend these are equal to the first. It says so plainly:

Those who gave and fought before the triumph are not like others: they are greater in rank than those who gave and fought afterwards. But God has promised a good reward to all of them.

QUR'AN 57:10

But that same verse holds a door open: a good reward to all of them. And Suhayl walked through it. He did not become a lukewarm Muslim trading old power for new. He became known for his prayer, his fasting, his charity, and for weeping before the Kaaba, begging Allah's forgiveness. He went out to the edge of Makkah to learn the Qur'an from a teacher who was one of the Helpers, and when a man mocked him for not learning from one of Quraysh, Suhayl answered that this was exactly the ignorance that had ruined them, the arrogance that had let everyone else

race ahead to the good while their pride held them back. He carried his regret openly, wishing aloud that he had been among the first.

And then the prophecy came true. When the Prophet ﷺ passed away in Madinah, some in Makkah began to whisper that now was their chance to throw off Islam, and the rebellion grew so loud that the governor went into hiding. It was Suhayl who stood at the Kaaba and stilled them with almost the same words Abu Bakr had used in Madinah: whoever worshipped Muhammad, Muhammad has died, but whoever worshipped Allah, Allah is living and does not die. Do not be the last to enter Islam and the first to leave it. The mouth Umar had once wanted to silence forever was now the mouth that saved Makkah for Islam, exactly as the Prophet ﷺ had foretold.

He did not stop there. He went to Madinah, joined the armies of Abu Bakr, and went out to fight beside the two sons he had once tortured. At the battle of Yamamah, father and sons fought together, and Abdullah was martyred. Suhayl and Abu Jandal found his body and wept over it, and Suhayl said he hoped his martyred son would count him among the first he would intercede for, having heard that the martyr intercedes for seventy of his loved ones. Then he kept on. Already in his late sixties, he fought on the front lines against the Byzantines beside Abu Jandal, swearing he would never again spend an hour of his life except striving for Allah, until he was killed as a martyr or died as a stranger far from home. He had stood with the disbelievers once; he would now stand with the believers for as long as he drew breath. And he and many of his family did die as strangers, in the plague of Amwas, their households carried away together, counted as martyrs by the words of the Prophet ﷺ.

What this family's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read this as a tale of brave sons and a stubborn father who came around in the end. But there is something in it that reaches past character and touches our iman directly.

Look first at the children. Abdullah and Abu Jandal believed when belief brought them nothing but a whip and a chain. When his father offered him the richest fortune in Quraysh if only he would stay silent, Abdullah said, what is with Allah is better and everlasting, and he meant it with his whole life. When Abu Jandal was dragged back into torture before the eyes of the very believers he had run to, he did not let go of his faith. That is the question their lives put to us. We tend to give Allah our hearts only after we are sure it is safe, after the cost has been counted. They gave first, in the dark, with everything to lose. Ask yourself what it would mean to trust Allah's promise before the outcome is visible, to say what is with Allah is better and live as though you believed it when something you love is on the line.

Then look at Hudaybiyyah, where faith and feeling are pulled apart. Every instinct in those believers screamed that returning Abu Jandal was wrong, and the Prophet ﷺ returned him anyway, because Allah's decree required it. He could tell him only to be patient, and that Allah would make a way out, and within the year Allah did, more completely than any of them could have forced. This is the heart of contentment with Allah's decree. There will be moments in your own life when obedience feels like surrender, when patience feels like defeat, when the way out is nowhere in sight. Abu Jandal's life tells you to hold on through that hour without bitterness, because the One writing the story sees an ending you cannot yet see.

And then there is Suhayl, the reason this is a story of redemption and not only of the firsts. He wasted decades. His pride held him back while his own children raced ahead, and he knew it, and wept over it before the Kaaba for the rest of his life. But he did not let his late start become an excuse to stay where he was. The Prophet ﷺ had said that one who comes last might one day excel even the first, and Suhayl spent every remaining breath trying to close that distance: in prayer, in charity, in tears, on the battlefield, until he died a martyr. If you carry the weight of years given to the wrong things, his life is mercy to you. It is never too late to turn fully to Allah, and the door He held open in His own words, a good reward to all of them, is open still. He asks not that you grieve your wasted time forever, but that you give Him everything left.

So take one thing from this family into an ordinary day. Trust Allah's promise the way Abdullah did, before it is safe. Be patient under one hard decree the way Abu Jandal was, without a word of complaint to your Lord. And if you have wasted time, turn the way Suhayl turned, fully, with no more delay, beginning today, for the sake of Allah alone. May Allah be pleased with Abdullah and Abu Jandal, who believed when it cost them everything, and with Suhayl, who teaches us that no one is ever too far from coming home, and may He never leave us among those who hold back at the gates of Paradise.

This chapter follows the account of Abu Jandal, Abdullah, and Suhayl ibn Amr (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel

Haleem (12:92, 57:10). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Omar ibn al-Khattab

The One Who Took the Keys of Jerusalem

There is a city that the first Muslims faced in prayer before they ever faced Makkah. For years, in the early days of the message, when a believer in Makkah or Madinah stood to pray, his body turned toward Jerusalem. It was the direction of their longing before it was ever the direction of their ownership. And so when, decades later, the keys of that city were placed into the hand of a Muslim, it was not the arrival of a conqueror at a foreign place. It was the return of a people to the city their hearts had already faced.

The man who took those keys was Omar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him). To understand what happened in Jerusalem, and why a single bare-headed traveller in a patched garment is remembered more than the armies around him, you have to begin long before he arrived, with the city itself and what had been done to it.

A holy land soaked in blood

Before Islam reached it, Jerusalem had been torn apart. In the years when the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was beginning his public call, around 613, the Persian and Byzantine empires were locked in a war that swallowed cities whole. The largest city of Sham then was not Damascus, which came second, but Homs.

Damascus fell to the Persians in 613. The following year, in 614, they took Jerusalem itself.

The Persians were Zoroastrians, fire-worshippers who saw nothing sacred in the holy land. They had no shrine there, nothing to revere. What they understood was that this city was the beating heart of religious life for the Christians of the Byzantine empire, and so they set out to make an example of it. They carried out one of the largest massacres of that entire century. Ninety thousand people were killed. Consider what that meant in a world without modern weapons: ninety thousand human beings cut down in a single onslaught. The Christian holy sites were desecrated. They even seized from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre what the Christians called the True Cross, the relic on which they believed Jesus, peace be upon him, had been crucified.

The arrogance of the victor was complete. Kisra, the Persian ruler, wrote to Heraclius, the Byzantine emperor, and told him in effect: I am clearly god, and whatever you worship could not defend Jerusalem. This is the recurring pattern of tyrants. Every one of them, given enough power, eventually concludes that he must be divine, and then Allah humbles him. And through all of this, the Muslims in Makkah were praying toward that very city while its sanctity lay in ruins.

It was into this moment that Allah revealed a prophecy that seemed impossible. The Romans had been crushed, yet Allah promised they would rise again and win. The transcript points us to the opening of Surah Ar-Rum:

The Byzantines have been defeated in a nearby land. They will reverse their defeat with a victory in a few years' time: God is in command, first and last. On that day, the

believers will rejoice at God's help. He helps whoever He pleases: He is the Mighty, the Merciful.

QUR'AN 30:2-5

The Prophet ﷺ voiced this when it looked unthinkable, and it carried a double meaning. The Christians, nearer in faith to the Muslims, would defeat the Persians; and the believers themselves would one day prevail over those who had aligned against them. In 624, the same year as Badr, Heraclius struck back and the Romans defeated the Persians, exactly as Allah had foretold.

The city the Prophet ﷺ kept seeing

Jerusalem kept appearing to the Prophet ﷺ across his life. On the night of the Israa, he was carried there and led the prophets in prayer. When Quraysh interrogated him afterward, demanding details to expose him, he said it was as if Jerusalem were raised up before his eyes, and he described its roads and its structures so perfectly that the questioners were silenced.

He saw it again from the trench. When the confederate armies gathered against Madinah and the believers dug the Khandaq, the Prophet ﷺ struck a stubborn rock and Allah showed him the palaces of distant lands: Yemen, Persia, the lands of Sham. He promised his exhausted, besieged followers that they would reach those places. The hypocrites mocked him, sneering that these men could not even relieve themselves without fearing for their lives, yet were being promised empires. But the promise was not the Prophet's; it was Allah's. And a striking detail survives: nearly every companion who narrated that vision later went to one of the very places the Prophet ﷺ had described.

He urged his companions toward Jerusalem with his own words, teaching that a journey is undertaken to only three mosques: the Sacred Mosque in Makkah, his own mosque in Madinah, and Al-Aqsa. And so the longing for that city was planted in the hearts of the first believers, the very people who had once turned their faces toward it in prayer, waiting for the day it would be theirs to enter.

The most powerful man in the world, alone in the desert

Then came the time of Omar. The transcript asks us to pause and feel the sheer scale of what unfolded in his caliphate. Iraq, Iran, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, Afghanistan, and lands beyond, all came under Islam in his years. The Persian empire, the most arrogant power on earth, which had laughed at the Bedouin standing before Rostam as if they were a joke, collapsed in a single year at Qadisiyyah. The Byzantines were broken at Yarmouk, and after that battle the fall of the rest was only a matter of time.

Jerusalem was now besieged from every direction. The Muslims had taken Damascus, Egypt, and the land of Jordan, and they surrounded the city on all sides. But they did not want to spill blood in Al-Quds. This is the part that must not be rushed. An army that had defeated two empires sat outside a city it could have stormed, and it waited. For four months the Muslims were camped around Jerusalem, a patient army that killed no one, while negotiations went on.

Inside the city was its patriarch, Sophronius, remembered as a saint in his church, a noble man who cared less for Byzantine politics than for his faith, his churches, and the ability of his people to worship. Knowing what the Persians had done, he had quietly sent the cross away to Constantinople in case the

Muslims proved treacherous. But as the talks went on, he came to feel that these Muslims genuinely did not want to kill anyone, that they were trying to make this a bloodless transfer. The terms astonished him: the Christians could keep their faith, their churches, their crosses; they would pay the jizya and receive protection; and that tax, which exempted them from fighting for an empire they did not believe in, was lower than what the Muslims themselves paid in zakah.

Then Sophronius made one final demand. He had heard of a man written about in scripture, a man whose justice was known, and he insisted that this man himself come to take the keys. He wanted the caliph. He wanted Omar. When the Muslims tried sending Khalid ibn al-Walid, who resembled Omar in build, the ruse failed at once, because Khalid had become too famous in the battles. The Christians would not be fooled. It had to be Omar.

So Omar consulted Uthman and Ali (may Allah be pleased with them). Ali, the companion Omar most often turned to for counsel, told him this was a special opportunity, a place for which the Prophet ﷺ had held great ambition, and that it was worth the risk. Go, he said, and receive the keys. Ali himself was placed in charge of Madinah while Omar was away.

And here is the heart of it. Did the most powerful man in the world set out with a great army to receive the keys of Jerusalem? He took one camel and one servant. No army. He carried his sword, he had his sandals, and he set out into the desert alone. He wore no turban, no helmet; his head was bare, and he was bald. His garment was a white woollen robe with seventeen patches sewn into it where it had torn, the patches scattered unevenly down his left side, sewn with whatever colours he could

find, with no thought for matching them. He had nothing on him to suggest a ruler at all.

It gets more remarkable. He told the servant they would split the journey in half: the servant would ride the camel half the way, and Omar would ride the other half. So for half the trip from Madinah to Jerusalem, the commander of the believers walked in the desert pulling the reins while his servant sat above him.

As they neared Palestine, it was the servant's turn to ride. The servant protested: they are waiting for you, not for me, it is enough that you have shared this evenly, get on the camel. Omar refused. Honour, he said, belongs to the one who fulfills his trust. He did not care if crowds were waiting and would see him pulling a camel. They had agreed, half and half. And then, as they entered Palestine, Allah decreed that Omar step into a puddle of mud, so that the white garment with its seventeen patches was now spattered with mud as well.

"We are a people whom Allah has honoured through Islam"

The people had lined the streets for miles. They sat in their balconies to see the great man they had heard so much about, the ruler who never left Madinah, now coming because Islam had spread to every land around them. As Omar reached al-Jabiyah, in the area known today as the Golan Heights, some of the companions came out to meet him, and they were uneasy. Could they get him armour, buy him something fitting, put a helmet on him? Let him wear what befits the commander of the believers who comes to receive the keys of Jerusalem.

They had a point, and a good intention. But Omar answered with words that have echoed ever since. He said: We are a people

whom Allah has honoured through Islam, and whenever we seek honour through anything else, Allah will humiliate us.

This was not the bitterness of a poor man making a virtue of necessity. The commander of the army in Sham was Abu Ubaidah ibn al-Jarrah, the trustworthy one of this ummah, whose bare little home had once made Omar weep when he found no possessions in it. "I told you that you would cry," Abu Ubaidah had said. "The world changed all of us except you," Omar replied. So this was not about poverty. It was a principle: the Muslims would not adopt the pomp of empires to impress anyone. We will be ourselves, Omar was saying, and I am entering Jerusalem like this. Come with me, or stay behind.

And so Omar walked into Jerusalem, his servant on the camel, his patched white garment streaked with mud, and the watching crowds asked one another who this man could be, and what kind of religion produced such a leader. Then something happened that always happens when a person humbles himself for Allah: the people began to praise him. This is the most powerful man on earth, they said, and look at how he carries himself. The patriarch Sophronius looked at him and was glad, and he said a true thing: with a leader like you, your people will never be defeated.

The keys, and the prayer outside the church

Before anything was handed over, there was a covenant to sign, the Pact of Omar. Even its opening showed the man. It began in the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful, and named the giver as the slave of Allah, Omar, commander of the believers: no title of grandeur anywhere in it. The pact granted the Christians of Jerusalem the protection of their lives, their churches, their crosses, and their security, in exchange for the jizya. One condition the Christians themselves asked for, born

of their war with the Jews, was that the expelled Jews not be returned; yet Omar, the histories say, allowed roughly seventy Jewish families back into the city. The justice of the man did not disappoint.

Then Sophronius gave Omar a tour of Al-Quds. At ease now about who this man was, the patriarch handed him the keys to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre itself, the holiest site in Christianity. Omar received it as a trust. And here is one of the most beautiful things in the whole account: the keys were entrusted to a single Muslim family, and to this day a Muslim family holds the keys of that church and opens it every morning for the Christians. What looks like a paradox is in fact a mercy that ended generations of fighting among the Christian denominations over who would hold the keys. The trust of the Muslim was never betrayed.

When the time for prayer came, the patriarch, in friendship, invited Omar to pray inside the church. Omar refused, but not out of disdain. He understood something with a clear vision. If I pray here, he said, the Muslims who come after me will turn this into a mosque, saying Omar prayed here, and they will take your church from you. So he stepped outside and prayed beyond its doors, precisely so that his community would never seize the Christians' place of worship. And exactly as he foresaw, the spot where he prayed became a mosque, the Mosque of Omar, built a short distance from the Holy Sepulchre, where the call to prayer still rises beside the holiest church in Christianity, and the worshippers there are Palestinians.

A reunion, and a voice that broke them all

This gathering was more than a political ceremony. It was a reunion. Many of these companions had not seen one another

since Madinah, scattered across the conquests, and now they stood together in the city they had faced in prayer in their earliest days as Muslims, all of them among the first. It was a surreal moment.

When Omar saw Bilal (may Allah be pleased with him), he embraced him for a long time, and the two of them wept. Then Omar asked him for something he had refused everyone since the Prophet's death. Make the adhan for us, he said. This is one of the days of Allah, one of those rare days in history that do not come again. But Bilal had taken a vow: he would never call the adhan for anyone after the Prophet ﷺ until he met him again. Omar pressed him with the one argument that could move him. This would have made the Prophet ﷺ happy, he said. If he were here he would have ordered you to do it, just as he was the one who ordered you to call the adhan first in Makkah and then in Madinah, an honour given to no other companion. Do you think he would pass you over now? Please, make the adhan for us.

So Bilal rose to call the prayer in Jerusalem, his "Allahu Akbar" sounding over the holy city. And every companion present wept. The transcript records that Omar wept so hard that he fell to his knees while Bilal was calling, and the companions gathered around to console him. Because suddenly this was not Jerusalem anymore. The sound of that voice carried them back to Madinah, to the days they had spent with the Prophet ﷺ, and the loss of him broke over them all at once.

Then came the two most honoured prayers ever offered in that place. The first had been on the night of the Israa, when the Prophet ﷺ led all the prophets and they prayed behind him. The second was this: Omar leading the companions of the Prophet ﷺ in prayer, the gathering of the first believers behind a single

imam. Omar searched out the exact spot where the Prophet ﷺ had prayed, refusing to be misled toward the rock, insisting on the precise place. He found it. And the area, which the Christians had turned into the foulest rubbish heap of the city out of contempt for the Jews who had sided with the Persians, Omar and the companions cleaned with their own hands.

When Omar prayed there, leading the Muslims as the first after the Prophet ﷺ to pray publicly in Al-Aqsa, he recited Surah Sad in the first cycle, and in it he reached a verse that shook him as he stood on that liberated ground:

David, We have given you mastery over the land. Judge fairly between people. Do not follow your desires, lest they divert you from God's path.

QUR'AN 38:26

A man who had just received a city without bloodshed, who had refused armour and pomp, who had walked half the desert on foot to keep faith with a servant, stood in the freed sanctuary and heard the command to rule with justice and not to follow his own desires. In the second cycle he recited Surah al-Israa, the chapter that opens with the Prophet's night journey to that very place. The believer who, on the night of the Israa, had been shown catching the milk that flowed through the Prophet's fingers was now leading the prayer where that vision had been fulfilled.

What Omar's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read this account and feel only the thrill of it, the patient army, the patched garment, the bare-headed caliph pulling a camel into the holy city. But the scene was never meant

to be admired from a distance. It is a question put to our own iman.

Start with the words he said at the gates: we are a people whom Allah has honoured through Islam, and whenever we seek honour through anything else, Allah will humiliate us. This is not advice about wardrobe. It is the whole orientation of a believing heart. Omar refused, in the most public moment of his life, to borrow his worth from how others might see him, because his worth came from Allah alone. We live the opposite by default. We reach for the helmet and the fine garment, for the approval of people, for the version of ourselves that impresses the crowd in the balconies. His life asks a hard and simple thing: do you seek your honour from Allah, or from the eyes of others? The quality to imitate here is that quiet refusal to perform for people, to do your work and worship for Allah and let Him decide your standing.

Then there is the trust he kept on the road. Honour belongs to the one who fulfills his trust, he told the servant, and he kept walking. No one was watching the agreement but Allah. There was no crowd at that stretch of desert to applaud him for pulling the reins while his servant rode. That is exactly why it matters. The amanah you keep when no one will ever know is the truest measure of your faith. In an ordinary life this looks small: finishing the work you were paid for when no manager is checking, returning what is not yours, keeping the promise that cost you something. Omar's grandfather kept faith in the dust of a forgotten road, and Allah raised him in front of an entire city for it. What you guard in private, Allah sees, and nothing kept for His sake is ever wasted.

Look too at the patience of that army. Two empires had fallen to them, and still they sat for four months outside a city they would

not bloody, because it was holy and because they were not a people who did to others what had been done to them. Faith is not only the courage to act; it is the patience to hold back when holding back is right, to refuse cruelty even when you have the power for it, to trust that Allah's way is better than the swift and brutal way. When you are wronged and have the upper hand, Omar's Jerusalem asks whether you can be just instead of vengeful.

And consider where his certainty came from. The Prophet ﷺ promised besieged, mocked, frightened men that they would reach Persia and Yemen and the lands of Sham, and the believers held to that promise through the trench when the hypocrites laughed. They held to the prophecy of Ar-Rum when the Byzantines lay crushed and it seemed impossible. Then they watched it all come true. This is the lesson buried in the whole account: Allah's promise does not fail, however far off it looks. The same God who turned a defeated empire into a victor, who carried a praying people from facing a ruined city to holding its keys, is the God whose promise to you of relief after hardship and of Paradise for the faithful will not fail either. Believe it before you see it. Let it steady you when the outcome is hidden.

So take something from him into your own day. Do one piece of your work purely for Allah, refusing to advertise it. Keep one trust that no one would ever check. Hold your tongue and your hand where you have the power to strike, and choose justice instead. And when life looks bleak and the promise seems far, remember the believers in the trench who were promised empires while fearing for their lives, and trust your Lord. Omar lived all of this in the open, but its root was hidden in his heart, in his fear of Allah and his love for the Prophet ﷺ, and that root is available to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Omar ibn al-

Khattab, grant us a measure of his sincerity and his justice, fill our hearts with certainty in His promise, and allow us, as He gathered the first believers in that blessed place, to be gathered with them.

This chapter follows the account of Omar ibn al-Khattab (RA) and the opening of Jerusalem in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (30:2-5, 38:26). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Omar ibn al-Khattab

The One Who Distinguishes Truth from Falsehood

There is a kind of man whom the world remembers for his strength, and forgets to ask what that strength was made of. Omar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) is that man. The story we reach for, when we want to put someone in line, is the story of his sternness: the booming voice, the firm hand, the figure even Shaytan stepped aside to avoid. But the people who lived beside him knew a secret. The hardest man in Madinah was harder on himself than he was on anyone else. His nights had worn two thin channels down his face, eroded by tears. And when Abu Bakr asked the companions whether Omar should lead the Muslims after him, the finest answer came back: what people do not know of him is even better than what they know.

That is the man worth meeting slowly. Not the sword, but the soul behind it. The scholars singled out things about him, some unique to him, some virtues he simply carried better than anyone else. They are not a list of his achievements. They are a window into a heart so sincere that goodness seemed to seek it out.

A man guided toward the truth

Before anything else, the Prophet ﷺ wanted Omar in Islam so badly that he made it a supplication. He saw something in him. It can almost be said that Allah shaped this one man for the sake of

His religion, that there is no single person after the Prophet ﷺ from whom so much good would flow.

What was that something? The scholars call it being divinely inspired toward the truth. We carry within us a fitrah, an innate disposition that leans toward Allah, toward mercy, toward justice. The more sincere a person is in seeking Allah, the more that disposition is polished, until their instincts begin to line up with what Allah intended. This never overrides revelation. But in Omar it ran so deep that the Prophet ﷺ said there were people in the nations before us who were spoken to by the angels, and if there were any such person in this ummah, it was Omar. He was muhaddath, a man addressed: not in conversation, but in those true promptings that come to a heart kept clean.

You can see that honesty in the smallest moments. When the Prophet ﷺ said that none of us truly believes until he loves him more than his family, his wealth, and even himself, Omar could have stayed silent. Instead he did the arithmetic out loud. He told the Prophet ﷺ, honestly, that he loved him more than his wealth and his family, but that he was not yet sure he loved him more than his own self. He went home and played out the scenarios in his mind. If an arrow were flying toward the Prophet ﷺ, would he step in front of it or step away? He came back the next day and swore that the Prophet ﷺ was now more beloved to him than his own soul, and the Prophet ﷺ smiled and said, "Now, Omar." He could not bring himself to claim a thing before it was true. This is why the Prophet ﷺ said that had there been a prophet after him it would have been Omar, and why he is remembered as al-Faruq, the one who separates truth from falsehood, then throws his whole weight behind the truth.

When the Qur'an agreed with him

There is a category of virtue that belongs to Omar almost alone. On several occasions his opinion preceded the revelation, and then the revelation came down agreeing with him.

He longed for clarity even when it cost him a pleasure. Before Islam, no one loved wine more than Omar, and yet it was Omar who kept asking Allah to make the matter of intoxicants clear, hoping it would be forbidden, though it was something he had once loved. He wanted the truth more than the comfort of not knowing. The prohibition came in stages, and his instinct had run ahead of it. The same thing happened at the standing place of Ibrahim, when he wished aloud that it could be taken as a place of prayer, and revelation followed. It happened with the verses of hijab. It happened over the captives of the Battle of Badr.

That one is worth pausing on, because it shows the shape of his mind. The Prophet ﷺ, whose mercy was wider than the sea, was inclined to release the prisoners. Omar argued for a sterner course, not out of cruelty, but because he saw that these were people who would regroup and return to fight. The verse descended siding with what Omar had seen.

His care for the truth reached even to how the words of Allah would be preserved. After many who had memorized the Qur'an were killed in battle, it was Omar who pressed Abu Bakr to gather it into a single written collection, so that no one could ever claim it had been lost. Abu Bakr hesitated, then said that Allah opened his heart until he saw what Omar had seen. Usually it was Omar who came around to the others; here the truth was with him, and the humility of Abu Bakr was great enough to follow it.

A man the Prophet ﷺ saw in his dreams

No companion appears in the dreams of the Prophet ﷺ as often as Omar, and the dreams of the Prophet ﷺ were a form of revelation. They were always about his goodness, and about what awaited him.

In one, the people were shown to the Prophet ﷺ wearing shirts of different lengths. Some reached the chest, some the knees, some lower. Omar passed before him dragging a garment along the ground, and when they asked how he interpreted it, he said, "Religion." The length of the cloth was the measure of a person's hold on the faith. Ask yourself, in that gathering, how long your own shirt would be.

In another, the Prophet ﷺ drank from a cup of milk and saw it overflow from his hands, running even from his fingernails, and Omar was catching and drinking that milk. The interpretation was knowledge. He had pressed himself against the source of guidance so eagerly that the overflow ran into his hands. In Madinah he had an arrangement with a neighbor from the Ansar: when one of them could not be present with the Prophet ﷺ, the other would go and bring back everything that had been said, so that not a single word would be missed.

In a third dream, the Prophet ﷺ stood at a well drawing water with a bucket, and handed it to Abu Bakr, who drew for the short time of his leadership. Then Omar took it, and the Prophet ﷺ said he had never seen anyone draw with such strength, pulling until every person had drunk their fill and even the animals had knelt to drink. Note the detail: in the dream, his justice reached even to the animals.

And there is a fourth, gentle and almost playful. The Prophet ﷺ saw a beautiful palace in Paradise with a woman performing wudu beside it, and it was so beautiful he assumed it was his

own, until Jibril told him it belonged to Omar. So he turned away, remembering the dignity and protective jealousy of Omar, not wishing to intrude. When the Prophet ﷺ told this dream after Fajr, with Omar sitting before him, anyone might have leaned in to ask about the palace, the color, the view. Omar wept. "Would I ever be jealous of you, Messenger of Allah?" His first thought was not the palace. It was the fear that he had, for even a moment, made the Prophet ﷺ uncomfortable on his behalf. With every assurance of Paradise the Prophet ﷺ gave him, Omar feared Allah as though he were a man who would never be granted it.

The man Shaytan walked around

One day some women of Quraysh were sitting with the Prophet ﷺ, speaking in voices louder than his own, for he was modest and soft-spoken in their company. When they heard that Omar was at the door, they scrambled behind the curtains. Omar entered to find the Prophet ﷺ laughing. He asked what had made him laugh, praying that Allah would always keep him smiling. The Prophet ﷺ told him: these women were just now raising their voices with me, and the moment they heard your voice, they hid. Omar called out to them, half in disbelief, asking how they could fear him and not the Messenger of Allah. One called back that he was harsher and harder than the Prophet ﷺ.

Now those are the very two qualities Allah named when He told His Prophet that gentleness was a mercy:

By an act of mercy from God, you [Prophet] were gentle in your dealings with them- had you been harsh, or hard-hearted, they would have dispersed and left you- so pardon them and ask forgiveness for them.

So Omar, hearing himself described with the words that drive people away, grew worried, and turned to the Prophet ﷺ. And the Prophet ﷺ, who never lied even in jest, swore by the One in whose hand his soul was that Shaytan himself, if he saw Omar walking down a path, would take a different path. Shaytan would not even share a street with him.

What does that actually mean? Allah warns us about following Shaytan's footsteps:

Believers, do not follow in Satan's footsteps- if you do so, he will urge you to indecency and evil. If it were not for God's bounty and mercy towards you, not one of you would ever have attained purity.

QUR'AN 24:21

The whispering comes first; the footsteps come after, once a person has let him in. The scholars drew a beautiful lesson from the hadith. Omar lived so constantly in the remembrance of Allah, his whole life a kind of walking dhikr, that the fortress was never left unguarded. Shaytan could find no crack to whisper through, and so he gave up on him and went looking elsewhere. From the day Omar read Surah Taha and accepted Islam, it was as if Shaytan parted ways with him forever. Omar was not infallible, no companion was. But his mistakes were never the lowly, devilish kind. His errors came from righteous zeal, never from ego or base desire.

His worship in the depth of the night

No one among the companions was known for the night prayer the way Omar was. His voice was the deepest of them all, and

even when he tried to lower it, it carried. The Prophet ﷺ once told Abu Bakr, who prayed softly, to raise his voice a little, and told Omar, who prayed loudly, to lower his. Omar said he prayed aloud so that the devils around him would flee, driving Shaytan away by night with the recitation of the Book of Allah as he drove him away by day.

And he wept. The two channels worn into his face were carved by the tears of his night prayers. When he heard the Qur'an recited, it was as though Allah were addressing him personally. Once he heard a reciter reach the verses of the punishment and said, "By the Lord of the Kaaba, He is speaking to me," and the fear gripped him so hard that he fell ill and kept to his bed, while people came to visit him not knowing what had struck him down. A verse had stung him, because he worried about himself.

This is one of the most important lessons his whole life offers, and it is easy to miss. People love the story of Omar's strength and reach for it whenever they want to justify their own harshness. But if you do not have the night prayer of Omar, do not pick up the stick of Omar. His standing in the dark made him gentler with people and severer only with himself. So when Omar later appointed a governor over Kufa, his first instruction was not political strategy. It was this: guard your prayer, for if you lose your prayer, you will lose everything that comes after it.

The mercy beneath the sternness

People do not think of Omar in terms of mercy, and that is precisely why it is worth seeing.

He waived the punishment for theft during a year of famine, because the poor were stealing food to survive. He said that to relax a punishment by giving the accused the benefit of the

doubt was more beloved to him than to carry it out while doubt remained. He saw an elderly man from the People of the Book begging, and learned that the state had taken the tax from this man in his youth and then abandoned him in his old age, so he arranged a stipend for him from the public treasury.

He knew his own temperament, and he prayed against it. Among his supplications: "O Allah, I am harsh, so make me gentle. O Allah, I am stingy, so make me generous. O Allah, I am weak, so make me strong." That last word, strength, he meant in the Prophetic sense: not the man who overpowers others, but the one who controls himself in a moment of anger. Self-awareness, after sincerity, is the most important ingredient in purifying the soul. And once, when a man stood before the people and accused him of injustice, you could see the anger rising in him, until someone recited to him the words of Allah:

Be tolerant and command what is right: pay no attention to foolish people.

QUR'AN 7:199

The anger left him at once, as though the man had said nothing. Whenever he was met with the Book of Allah, Omar stopped where it told him to stop, immediately, without resistance. That was the secret of his sternness. It was never his own self speaking. It was always bent to revelation.

Humility without limit

A man who held the most powerful office in the world used to say, "May Allah have mercy on the one who shows me my faults." He did not want people around him who would flatter him; he wanted those who would tell him where he had erred. If anyone

said to him, "Fear Allah," his whole stature seemed to shrink on the spot, and he would lean in to hear what came next. Most of us bristle when we are corrected. Omar softened.

His justice did not flinch even when it touched his own house. When the son of the governor of Egypt struck a Coptic man who had beaten him in a race, the man traveled all the way to Madinah, and Omar handed him the whip and told him to strike back. And when his own son fell into a grave sin in Egypt and the governor carried out the punishment quietly, out of regard for whose son he was, Omar summoned him and had it done fully and publicly. The son of the Commander of the Believers would receive no special treatment.

There is a famous scene with a Persian noble who came to Madinah expecting a palace and was told that the most powerful man on earth was asleep under a tree, his sandals beneath his head, with no bodyguard, because he had wronged no one and had no one to fear. The noble said the line that has echoed ever since: you ruled with justice, so you were secure, so you could sleep. Omar used to say, "Do not be impressed by the loudness of a man's voice. The man is the one who fulfills the trust placed in him and restrains himself from harming the honor of people." It is the opposite of how we usually measure strength.

Asceticism, and a man who held himself to account

This is the part of his life that is hardest to read, because it does not let us off easily. Omar was not the companion of fine clothes and good food. He told us himself, plainly, that he could have had the finest cuts of meat and the best of living if he had wanted them, for he knew exactly what a good life tasted like. But he chose to keep his pleasures for the Hereafter, fearing the description Allah gives of those who exhaust all their good things

in this world and leave nothing for the next. He once stopped a beloved companion carrying meat home and asked, with real concern, whether the man bought whatever he desired the moment he desired it, not because any of it was forbidden, but because a soul that is never denied anything grows soft. Sometimes, he taught, a person should deny himself a permitted thing, not to the point of harm, but enough to learn again how to be grateful.

And no one held himself to account like Omar. His most famous words are a summons that has rung through the centuries: hold yourselves to account before you are held to account, and weigh your own deeds before they are weighed for you, for the reckoning will be lighter tomorrow for those who reckon with themselves today. This is the same man given glad tidings of Paradise, the man of all those dreams. And still he went to Hudhayfah, the companion who alone knew the names of the hypocrites, and asked him, "Am I one of them?" Still he said that if a caller announced that everyone would enter Paradise except one person, he would fear he was that one; and if a caller announced that everyone would enter the Fire except one, he would hope to be that one. That is the balance of hope and fear held in perfect tension, in a heart that never let either one win.

When Abu Bakr was choosing him to lead the Muslims, he asked the companions one by one. The finest answer came from Uthman, who himself stood next in line: by Allah, what is hidden of Omar is better than what is shown; his private self outshines his public one; there is no one among us like him. All of his virtues, in the end, gather into a single word. Ikhlas. Sincerity. Everything he did, the sternness and the tears, the justice and the mercy, the public office and the nap under the tree, was for Allah, and Allah alone.

What Omar's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like Omar's and admire the strength, the justice, the boldness, and then close the book having changed nothing. That would be the smallest possible reading of it. His life is not a display of great character. It is a question put directly to your iman.

Begin with where he began: he wanted the truth even when it was inconvenient. He prayed for clarity on the very thing he loved, hoping it would be taken from him if Allah willed. Most of us do the opposite. We avoid the question because we fear the answer; we would rather not know whether a thing is permitted, because we do not want to give it up. Omar's sincerity was to seek Allah's truth more than his own comfort, and so his very instincts were guided. Ask yourself honestly whether there is a matter in your life you are refusing to examine because you already suspect what you will find. To turn and face it, for the sake of Allah, is the beginning of the iman Omar had.

Then take the lesson the scholars marked most clearly: if you do not have the night prayer of Omar, do not borrow his stick. His firmness with people was earned in the dark, alone, weeping before his Lord, harder on himself than on anyone alive. A man who corrects others while excusing himself is not following Omar; he is only wearing his sternness as a costume. The order is fixed. First the private striving, the standing in prayer, the reckoning with your own soul. Only then does any firmness with others come clean of ego. So before you raise your voice at anyone in the name of truth, raise it in your own night prayer first.

And hold his balance of hope and fear. Here was a man promised Paradise who still asked whether he might be a hypocrite, who still feared he could be the one soul to fall, who still hoped he

could be the one soul to be saved. That is not anxiety; it is the wakefulness of a heart that takes Allah seriously. We tend to lean too far one way, either a hope so casual it forgets the reckoning, or a fear so heavy it forgets the mercy. Omar walked the narrow path between them, and it kept him humble in his strength and hopeful in his striving.

So carry one thing from him into an ordinary day. Hold yourself to account tonight before you sleep, gently and honestly, the way he counseled, weighing one small deed before it is weighed for you. Guard your prayer as the first of your affairs, because if that is lost, everything after it loosens. And when you feel strong and right, let that be the moment you fear most for your own sincerity, and turn it quietly back to Allah. That is how the strongest man in Madinah lived: severe with himself, soft with the people, weeping in the night, certain of nothing except his need for his Lord. May Allah be pleased with Omar ibn al-Khattab, grant us a measure of his sincerity and his fear, and join us with him among those who held themselves to account before the Day they are accounted.

This chapter follows the account of Omar ibn al-Khattab (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (3:159, 24:21, 7:199). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Omar ibn al-Khattab

The Convert Who Changed the World

There is a night in the seerah that turns a page so completely that the historians of the Prophet's life mark a clear "before" and "after" by it. A man set out in the dark of Makkah with his sword drawn, walking fast, telling anyone who would listen that he was going to kill the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and put an end to the disruption that had come over the city. Before the night was finished, that same man was on his knees, weeping, saying the words there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. His name was Omar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), and after the Prophet ﷺ himself, no conversion in the history of this religion changed more than his.

To understand why his shahada was a turning point, you have to first understand the man who walked toward that house with murder in his heart, and the long, patient way Allah kept placing the truth before him until he could no longer look away.

The man Makkah feared and admired

He was Omar ibn al-Khattab ibn Nufayl, of Banu Adi, a small clan of Quraysh, respected but not among the great powerful houses. His mother, Hantamah bint Hisham, was from Banu Makhzum, which made Abu Jahl his uncle. So Omar had a foot in two worlds: a small proud tribe of his own, and a connection to one of the most powerful clans in the city.

Physically he was unmistakable. Tall, broad, immensely strong, a man so large that the children would scatter from the road when they saw him coming, even when he meant them no harm. His voice was so deep that one narration tells of a barber who fainted from fright when Omar simply spoke to him. The ground seemed to tremble under him. As a young man he supplemented his income by entering the wrestling competitions of his time, and he was not known to lose. He had also, rarely for Quraysh, learned to read and write in his teenage years, one of only a handful of literate men in the city. He knew poetry, and he used it the way he used his fists, to defeat his opponents in the contests of words and verse. Quraysh made him their ambassador, the man they sent to defend their honour and boast of their superiority before outsiders. He was the rare combination of intelligent and intimidating, and the whole city knew it.

His father, al-Khattab, was remembered for one thing above all: harshness. He was ruthless with his family and with strangers alike. Omar himself would later recall, standing in the valleys outside Makkah where he had once herded sheep and camels for his father and his aunts, how his father would exhaust him when he did his work right and beat him when he did it wrong, a man abusive with both his tongue and his hands. And here is the first quiet lesson of Omar's life, easy to miss: a man raised under cruelty does not have to become cruel. Omar could have inherited his father's harshness and justified it for the rest of his days. Instead, something in him turned the other way, toward a hunger for justice. He refused to make his father's cruelty his own inheritance.

There is a detail worth holding onto. Years later, as the leader of the believers with wealth pouring in from across the world, Omar once called the people to gather urgently, as though for war.

When they came, he simply told them: I am Omar, I used to be called Umayr, a barefoot shepherd tending my father's sheep for a handful of dates a day. He said his own soul had begun to whisper to him of his greatness, and he wanted to put it back in its place. The man Makkah had feared never forgot where he came from, and he used the memory to humble himself before Allah.

Why he hated the message

Omar did not love what he saw Islam doing to his city, and it is worth being honest about why, because it is not what we might assume. His opposition did not come, as Abu Jahl's did, from raw ego and tribal jealousy. Abu Jahl feared that Banu Hashim would gain an edge over Banu Makhzum, that his own clan would lose its standing. Omar's objection came from a different place. He cared about his people as a whole. To him, this new message was tearing families apart, splitting Makkah down the middle, weakening a society that had always stood together, exposing them to the mockery of their enemies, and insulting the gods and forefathers he had spent his life defending.

So he persecuted the Muslims. Not with Abu Jahl's murderous viciousness, but he was among those who harassed them, who made their lives in the city hard. He saw the believers as the source of a sickness in Makkah, a fitna he wanted ended. That was the heart he carried, and it makes what Allah did with him all the more astonishing. Allah did not save a man of pure malice. He took a man of genuine, misdirected conviction and turned that very conviction toward the truth.

The truth, placed before him again and again

What is striking about Omar's story is how patiently Allah set the truth in front of him before he ever accepted it, and how he kept brushing past it.

His own sister, Fatima bint al-Khattab, and her husband Sa'id ibn Zayd had embraced Islam in secret. His brother Zayd ibn al-Khattab, a quiet man who lived apart from the affairs of Quraysh, had embraced it before him, and would one day die a martyr at the Battle of Yamamah against Musaylimah the liar. When Omar found his brother's body on that battlefield years later, the scent of musk rose from it on the wind, and he said: may Allah have mercy on you, Zayd, you beat me twice, you beat me to Islam and you beat me to martyrdom. For the rest of his life, when the wind blew, Omar said he could still smell the scent of his brother.

Even his own cousin, Zayd ibn Amr ibn Nufayl, had searched for the religion of Ibrahim before the revelation ever came, and had been driven from the city for it, beaten by none other than Omar's own father.

Then there were the signs Omar saw with his own eyes. He once watched a man bring an animal to sacrifice before the idols at the Kaaba, and heard a voice cry out, a shout louder than any he had ever heard, announcing that a truthful, eloquent man was about to arise calling people to none but Allah. The crowd scattered in fear. Omar alone stood his ground to see where the voice came from. Days later he heard that a man had come forth claiming prophethood. He set it aside and did not want to know more.

And there was the woman, Umm Abdillah bint Abi Hathmah, whom Omar himself had helped to persecute. He found her loading her belongings, preparing to flee with her husband to Abyssinia to escape men like him. When he asked where she was going, she answered him in anger: we are leaving across the land

of Allah because you have made it impossible for us to worship Him here. She expected a curse, or a blow. Instead Omar lowered his head and said, may Allah be with you, and rode off looking wounded. She told her husband she had seen a softness in him she had never seen before. Her husband laughed and said the donkey of al-Khattab would become Muslim before Omar ever would. There is no clearer warning in the whole seerah against writing a soul off while breath remains in its body. The man everyone declared hopeless became one of the greatest believers ever to walk the earth.

The night under the cloth of the Kaaba

The night his heart finally broke open began, of all things, with a failed search for wine. Omar, then a young man in his mid-twenties, loved to drink, and one night he went out and could find none of his drinking companions and no one to make any for him. Sober and restless, he decided he would go and make tawaf around the Kaaba, almost as a last resort to pass the time.

When he arrived, late at night, he found the Prophet ﷺ standing entirely alone, praying before the Kaaba, reciting the Qur'an aloud. Omar paused. He had never really listened to this man's words before. He decided, for once, to listen. So he crept to the far side of the Kaaba and slipped beneath the cloth that draped it, moving quietly around until he stood almost directly before the Prophet ﷺ, with nothing between them but that hanging cloth.

And the Qur'an began to reach his heart. He found himself thinking that he had never heard anything more beautiful. The literate man, the lover of poetry, told himself: this man is a poet, just as Quraysh says. And at that very instant the Prophet ﷺ, reciting Surah al-Haqqah, answered the thought as if he had heard it:

this [Quran] is the speech of an honoured messenger, not the words of a poet- how little you believe!-

QUR'AN 69:40-41

Omar was shaken. He told himself instead: he is a soothsayer. And the recitation answered that too, that these were not the words of a soothsayer. It was as though the words were reading the inside of his mind. He fled the scene, sick and confused. The truth had entered his heart, and he was fighting it with everything he had, because to accept it would mean undoing his whole life, his reputation, everything Makkah knew him for.

The walk that ended on his knees

In that state of inner war, Omar came upon Abu Jahl rallying the leaders of Quraysh, offering a hundred red camels and all the gold a man could imagine to whoever would kill the Prophet ﷺ. Omar volunteered. He drew his sword and set out for the Prophet's ﷺ house, walking fast, not hiding his intent, saying aloud that he would end this fitna and return Makkah to what it had been.

On the way a man of his own clan, Nu'aym ibn Abdullah, who was himself a secret Muslim, stopped him and tried to turn him. When reasoning failed, Nu'aym played the one card that would stop a proud man: before you deal with Muhammad, deal with your own house. Your sister Fatima and her husband Sa'id have already become Muslim.

Omar turned and rushed to his sister's home. At the door he heard the sound of recitation from inside. It was Khabbab ibn al-Aratt, of the most persecuted class of Makkah, teaching them the Qur'an. Khabbab hid as Omar burst in. Omar struck Sa'id and pinned him, and when Fatima moved to protect her husband he

struck her across the face, drawing blood. The sight of his sister's blood stopped him. She looked at him through her tears and said: do whatever you want, we have become Muslim. He sat down, ashamed of himself, the rage draining out of him.

Then his eye fell on the pages of the Qur'an in the corner, and he asked to see them. His sister told him he was not pure enough to touch it, and that if he was sincere he should wash himself first. The man who had come to kill got up, washed, returned, and sat down. He read the opening, the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, names whose mercy his people did not even know to invoke, and he said: how beautiful these names are. Then he read the opening of Surah Taha:

It was not to distress you [Prophet] that We sent down the Quran to you, but as a reminder for those who hold God in awe,

QUR'AN 20:2-3

He read on, marvelling at the words, until he reached the verse that seemed addressed to him alone:

I am God; there is no god but Me. So worship Me and keep up the prayer so that you remember Me.

QUR'AN 20:14

Omar said: the One who spoke these words deserves that no one be worshipped besides Him. And then, looking up, he said the thing that captures his whole turning: from this Quraysh is fleeing? This is the evil they are so afraid of? This is what we have been running from?

Khabbab came out of hiding and gave Omar glad tidings, telling him he had heard the Prophet ﷺ supplicate: O Allah, strengthen

Islam with the more beloved to You of these two men, Omar ibn al-Khattab or Amr ibn Hisham, who was Abu Jahl. When Omar heard that the Prophet ﷺ had prayed for him, something final shifted. He said that in that moment there was no person on earth more beloved to him than the Messenger of Allah, the very man he had set out that morning to kill. Take me to him, he said.

He walked to the house of al-Arqam, sword still at his side, and knocked. The Muslims inside panicked when they saw who it was, for there was no one they feared more. But Hamza (may Allah be pleased with him), who had himself accepted Islam only three days earlier, was unbothered. Open the door, he said. If he comes for good, he will have it. If not, I will deal with him. The Prophet ﷺ said to let him in. He went to Omar himself, took hold of his garment, and pulled him down, speaking to him sternly: what brings you here? Will you not stop until Allah sends some disaster upon you? And Omar, brought to his knees and now eye to eye with the Prophet ﷺ for he was so tall, said: O Messenger of Allah, I have come to believe in Allah and His Messenger and what he has brought from Allah. I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that you are the Messenger of Allah.

The Prophet ﷺ said Allahu Akbar, and the believers in that hidden house, forgetting they were meant to keep their voices down, erupted with him in takbir, because they understood at once that this was no small thing.

A conquest in itself

It was no small thing. Omar's Islam came three days after Hamza's, and Makkah was changed within a matter of days. Omar would not stay hidden. Aren't we upon the truth, he asked the Prophet ﷺ, whether we live or die? Yes. Then why are we hiding? On that day the Prophet ﷺ gave him the name al-Faruq,

the one who separates truth from falsehood. The Muslims went out in two rows, one behind Hamza and one behind Omar, and prayed openly at the Kaaba for the first time. Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, who had been among the weak and persecuted and was almost killed for reciting the Qur'an aloud, later said simply: the Islam of Omar was a conquest. Before, the believers could not pray at the Kaaba; after Omar, they prayed, and when the people struck them, they struck back, until they were left alone.

Even his migration to Madinah carried his signature. While others slipped out in secret and concealed their journey, Omar made tawaf openly, prayed two calm units of prayer, and then walked up to the gathered leaders of Quraysh and announced: whoever wants his mother to weep over him, his wife to be widowed, and his children orphaned, let him meet me behind this valley. No one came to fight. Instead, some of the weak and oppressed of the city followed him quietly, asking to be taught and to travel with him, and Omar made the journey to Madinah at the head of the largest group of migrants, none of them afraid, because Omar was among them.

The genius of what the Prophet ﷺ did with him is the genius of guidance itself. He did not try to tame Omar's strength or extinguish his fire. He redirected it. Omar took the cruelty he had been raised in and turned it into mercy and justice for the weak. He took his anger and channelled it toward what was right. He took his strength and gave it to Allah. He became a man who wept and prayed through the night, who fed the hungry generously, who humbled himself the moment the Prophet ﷺ spoke. Every quality that might have destroyed him became, in Islam, a means of his elevation: he had been a walking dead man, and Allah gave him life and a light to walk by among the people.

What Omar's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read Omar's story and feel only the thrill of it, the sword, the night under the Kaaba, the man on his knees. But his life is not a story to be admired from a distance. It is a question pressed against our own iman.

The first thing it asks is this: do you believe that Allah can reach anyone, including the people you have already given up on, including the part of yourself you think is beyond fixing? The companion who said the donkey of al-Khattab would accept Islam before Omar was a good and sincere man, and he was completely wrong. As long as breath remains in a body, no soul is closed. This should change how you pray. Make du'a for the hardest heart you know, and make du'a for your own hardness, your own bad habit, your own distance from Allah, because the One who turned Omar in a single night is more than able to turn you. The hope is not naive. It is faith in the One who guides hearts.

The second thing it asks concerns what we do with what we are made of. Omar's opposition to Islam came from a genuine, if misguided, care for his people, and when that same conviction was pointed at the truth, it became one of the great forces in this religion. Strength, energy, even stubbornness are not the enemies of faith. They are raw material. Whatever Allah has given you, your intelligence, your drive, your influence, your hardness, was given to be turned toward Him. Omar gives us no excuse to say I am too strong-willed, too rough, too set in my ways to change. He took every trait that could have damned him and handed it to Allah.

And the third thing is the quietest. The man whom children fled from in the street, who could clear a crowd with his fists, broke

down weeping before an old woman in the street because she had once reminded him to fear Allah, and broke down at the words you, wrapped in the cloth of the Kaaba, because the Qur'an had spoken to him. His strength never made him hard toward Allah. If anything it made his humility before Allah more total, because he had something real to lay down. The thing to imitate is not the strength. It is the surrender of the strength: to be capable, and to bend anyway when Allah speaks; to be right in the eyes of the world, and to admit you were wrong the moment the truth becomes clear; to walk fast, work hard, speak with confidence, and still get up in the night and weep before your Lord.

So take one thing from him into an ordinary day. Pray, sincerely, for one person you had quietly decided was hopeless. Take one strength you are proud of and spend it for the sake of Allah where no one is watching. And when the truth becomes clear to you about something in your own life, do what Omar did: do not defend your old self, do not count the cost to your reputation, simply turn. That is how the man who set out to end this religion became the one who opened its door, and the way he turned is still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Omar al-Faruq, fill our hearts with a measure of his certainty and his surrender, and gather us among those whose hearts He turned toward Him before it was too late.

This chapter follows the account of Omar ibn al-Khattab (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (69:40-41, 20:2-3,

20:14). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Khawla bint Hakim and Uthman ibn Madhun

The Righteous Couple

There is a kind of believer who never becomes a headline. They come from the smaller tribes, the ones without armies behind them, and they pass through history quietly, leaving behind not conquests but the shape of a faith lived all the way to the end. Khawla bint Hakim and her husband Uthman ibn Madhun (may Allah be pleased with them both) were two such people. They were among the first twenty souls on the earth to accept Islam, some scholars placing them as the fourteenth and fifteenth to believe. And yet, because they came from modest clans, and because the husband happened to share a name with a more famous companion, they are easy to overlook. If you sit with their lives, you find two people who gave everything they had to Allah and asked for nothing in return.

Two from the smaller tribes

They were Makkans, but not of the powerful clans of Quraysh. They were Qurashi enough to be protected by the bare fact of belonging, but they did not have the great tribe at their backs that would shield a man when he declared himself a Muslim. When they believed, they believed exposed, with something to lose and very little to guard them.

Uthman ibn Madhun carried a tie that would later run straight through the heart of Islam. His sister, Zaynab bint Madhun, was married to Umar ibn al-Khattab, and was the mother of two of Umar's children, Abdullah ibn Umar and Hafsa, who would one day be a Mother of the Believers. So Uthman was the maternal uncle of Abdullah ibn Umar, who in the books of hadith sometimes narrates from "my maternal uncle," meaning Uthman. It is a small detail, but it tells you how close this overlooked man stood to the center of the early community.

When Uthman accepted Islam, his whole house came with him. His brothers Abdullah and Qudamah believed, and so did his sister Zaynab, though she kept her Islam hidden from her husband Umar, because in those days no one wished to be the one to provoke him. One of the most striking narrations about this period says that an entire group of these early believers accepted Islam in the company of the Prophet ﷺ within a single hour, then went home, and their families believed too. One hour, and a cluster of households turned toward Allah forever, and Uthman and his family were inside it.

The man who would not lose his mind

Uthman ibn Madhun was loved. He was honest in his trade, respected by the elites of Quraysh even though he was not one of them. A powerful man named al-Walid ibn al-Mughirah, the very man whom the Qur'an would later rebuke for his hostility to the Prophet ﷺ, used to call Uthman his nephew, loved him, and shielded him from harm.

But the detail that tells you most about Uthman comes from before Islam ever reached Makkah. He was one of a tiny handful of men in that city who refused to drink. You have to understand how strange that was. The culture of the days of ignorance ran

on wine; they drank at their festivals, at their worship, even at their funerals. Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) would later say that if alcohol had been forbidden outright in the first days, the people could not have borne it, so deep was their attachment. And in the middle of all that, Uthman simply said no.

When they asked him why, his answer was not a sermon. Why, he said, would I drink something that would take away my mind and let men beneath me laugh at me? Why would I make a fool of myself while people of lower character mocked me? It was the instinct of someone who already understood, before any revelation told him, that a person's mind and self-respect are a trust not to be thrown away for an evening's pleasure. That instinct was the soil in which his faith would later grow.

"Why is it that I am protected, and they are not?"

When Uthman believed, he tasted some of the persecution that came to the early Muslims. The Prophet ﷺ chose him to lead the first migration to Abyssinia, the first time a group of believers left Makkah to seek safety under a just Christian king. When word reached them, falsely, that the people of Makkah had accepted Islam, the migrants came home, and Uthman returned with his wife to a city that had not changed at all.

It was then that al-Walid ibn al-Mughirah offered him his protection again. "O son of my brother," he said, "stay. No one will dare touch you while you are under my care." And it held. Uthman could walk openly in Makkah as a Muslim, and no hand was raised against him, because the power of al-Walid stood over him like a roof.

But Uthman could not enjoy that roof. He looked around at the poor and unprotected believers, men like Bilal and Khabbab,

being tortured for the sake of Allah, and the privilege began to burn him. What made him so special that he should be safe while his brothers suffered? So he went back to al-Walid and asked him to withdraw his protection. He wanted to feel what they felt, to stand where the persecuted stood, and he insisted until al-Walid, reluctantly, announced publicly that Uthman was no longer under his shield.

Not long after, Uthman was sitting near the Kaaba where the famous poet Labid was reciting. Labid said a line: everything other than Allah is false and will perish. "You have spoken truly," Uthman said. Then Labid went on, that every blessing will one day vanish. "You have lied," Uthman answered, "for the blessing of Paradise does not vanish." The poet bristled, and someone rose and struck Uthman in the eye.

Al-Walid, hearing of it, came and offered the protection back. And here Uthman gave one of the most beautiful answers in the whole story. He refused. "The protection of Allah," he said, "is better than your protection." And then, looking at his wounded eye, he said his only regret was that the blow had struck just one eye; the other had escaped, and he wished it too had been struck in the path of Allah. A man who could grieve that only half of him had suffered for Allah had a heart that had already left this world behind.

The matchmaker of Makkah

While Uthman walked his road of quiet defiance, his wife Khawla was building something of her own. From the moment he came home a believer, she had believed with him, without hesitation. In Makkah she became a close friend to the family of the Prophet ﷺ, especially to Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her). She was known for her intelligence, for her knowledge of medicine,

and above all for one particular gift: she was the woman in Makkah who arranged marriages, in the days of ignorance and now in Islam.

After Khadijah died, the house of the Prophet ﷺ fell into a long grief. He had married no one else in all the years of his marriage to her, and now the home was gloomy and full of tears. Khawla used to come to check on him, to bring food, to look after the household. And it was she who finally said to him, gently and then more firmly, that it was time to marry again.

The Prophet ﷺ hesitated. Who could replace Khadijah? But Khawla pressed, and she came with two names. One was an older woman, a widow of one of his companions, full of warmth and humor, who could bring life and light back into a house that had grown dark. That was Sawda bint Zam'ah, who had been Khawla's companion in Makkah and in Abyssinia; the bonds formed in that small exiled community lasted for life. The other name was for the future: the daughter of the man most beloved to the Prophet ﷺ in all the world, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq. That was Aisha, still too young to marry, but a match for when the time came.

Notice what the Prophet ﷺ did not do. He could have married almost anyone he wished; no family in Makkah would have refused him. And yet, when Khawla named these two, he did not reach out and claim them. He simply said: mention me to their families. That is the humility of the man Khawla loved to serve.

So Khawla went to work, carefully. She went first to Sawda and asked if she would want to marry the Prophet ﷺ. Sawda could scarcely believe it. "Do you think he would want me?" she asked. Khawla turned it back: would you want him? "Of course," said Sawda. Then Khawla went, properly, to Sawda's father, Zam'ah,

an old, rough, blind man not yet Muslim, who thought only of lineage. She told him Muhammad ibn Abdullah wished to marry his daughter, naming his noble ancestry. "A noble match," the old man cried, caring nothing for religion, only for the honor of the line. She had her answer. One marriage made.

Then Khawla went to Aisha's mother, Umm Ruman, the wife of Abu Bakr, with the same suspense: "What good has Allah brought into your house!" and then told her the Prophet ﷺ had mentioned Aisha. When Abu Bakr came home, he loved the idea, but raised two things. Was the Prophet ﷺ not his brother? The Prophet ﷺ explained that the brotherhood of faith does not create the ties that make marriage unlawful. And Aisha had been informally promised to another man whose family was not Muslim; that arrangement was set aside. Khawla carried the words back and forth until both matches were settled.

It is worth pausing on what that means. Every saying of the Prophet ﷺ that comes to us through Aisha, every ruling, every glimpse of his private life and his mercy, came through a marriage that Khawla arranged. It may well be that Allah assigns to her a share of the good in all of it. She could have claimed it; she sought no such credit. She made the match, and left the reward with Allah.

Three migrations, and a faith that kept deepening

When the call came to leave for Madinah, Khawla and Uthman went. This made them people of three migrations: twice to Abyssinia, and then to Madinah, a distinction few in the ummah carried. In Madinah, Khawla stayed close to the household of the Prophet ﷺ, a trusted confidante who kept checking in on his family's well-being.

Uthman, in Madinah, sank so deep into worship that he wanted to leave the world behind entirely. He wished to live like a monk: to pray all night, fast every day, give up the company of his wife, and have nothing more to do with this life. It came to light through Khawla herself. She visited Aisha one day in worn, neglected clothing, looking like a woman who had given up on the world. When Aisha asked what had happened, Khawla said her husband no longer had any need for this life; he fasted all day and prayed all night and had turned away from her entirely.

Aisha told the Prophet ﷺ, and he summoned Uthman. "Do you not have in me a good example?" he asked. "Of course, O Messenger of Allah," Uthman said. So the Prophet ﷺ taught him the balance of this religion: I fast, and I break my fast. I pray, and I sleep. And I keep the company of my wives. Why, then, would you turn away from my way? Uthman submitted at once; he had never meant to abandon the Prophet's path. Sometime later, Aisha saw Khawla again, dressed beautifully, and asked what had changed. Now, Khawla said, I am treated as a woman should be treated. See how tightly these two homes were woven: she had brought Aisha into his life, and through Aisha he had healed something in hers.

And Uthman's faith, already so deep, was still capable of growing. Abdullah ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with them both) narrated that one day Uthman was sitting with the Prophet ﷺ in his courtyard when the Prophet ﷺ suddenly raised his eyes to the sky, then looked to his right and his left, as if straining to hear something. Uthman, who knew how completely attentive the Prophet ﷺ always was when he sat with someone, found this strange. O Messenger of Allah, he said, I have sat with you many times, but today I saw you do something I have never seen. The

Prophet ﷺ told him that Jibril had come just then, while Uthman sat there, and had revealed a verse:

God commands justice, doing good, and generosity towards relatives and He forbids what is shameful, blameworthy, and oppressive. He teaches you, so that you may take heed.

QUR'AN 16:90

This is the verse recited from countless pulpits every Friday. And Uthman, who had already given up his protection and wished both his eyes had been struck for Allah, said something that should stop every one of us. At that moment, he said, faith overwhelmed his heart. Iman penetrated it and took it over, and he truly loved the Prophet ﷺ, with a complete love, in that instant. Here was one of the very first to believe, a man who had witnessed years of revelation, telling us that his faith still surged higher. The journey toward Allah has no ceiling.

The first to go home

Most of what we know of Uthman after this is about his death, because he did not live long in Madinah. A fever took him. And he holds a quiet, significant first: he was the first of the emigrants, the Muhajirun, to die in Madinah, and the first of them to be buried in al-Baqi. The people of Madinah knew death well, but Uthman was the first who had left his home for the sake of Allah, fled and been persecuted, to die in that state of exile.

The Prophet ﷺ was at his bedside as his soul departed. When he saw that Uthman had died, the tears flowed from his eyes, and he bent and kissed the forehead of his companion. They say Uthman's face was at ease, and the moisture of the Prophet's tears was still fresh upon it. The Prophet ﷺ took part in the burial

himself, and asked for a stone of a distinct color to mark the grave, calling it "the grave of my brother," and said he would bury beside him whoever of his family died. And so, to this day, the grave of Uthman ibn Madhun lies among the graves of the family of the Prophet ﷺ in al-Baqi, his wives and children gathered near him.

Over him the Prophet ﷺ said words of rare beauty: may Allah have mercy on you, Uthman; the world took nothing from you, nor did you take anything from it. The scholars explain that the world "takes" from a person by changing them, eroding their character and their faith. Uthman never let it; it never altered who he was, and it never bought him. Later, the Ansari woman in whose house his family had stayed told the Prophet ﷺ she had seen Uthman in a dream beside a flowing spring of water. "Those," the Prophet ﷺ said, "are his deeds," still pouring toward him in his grave. His wife Khawla mourned him in a tender poem, giving glad tidings to the one now buried who had passed into the pleasure of his Creator. And the Prophet ﷺ loved him so much that when one of his own daughters later died, he comforted those around her: go on ahead, to the company of the righteous, to Uthman ibn Madhun.

After her husband's death, Khawla remained in Madinah, and her life did not end in obscurity. She was among the believing women who offered themselves in marriage to the Prophet ﷺ. He did not marry her, as he did not marry several who came forward, but the histories report that the Qur'an's mention of a believing woman who offers herself to the Prophet ﷺ refers to Khawla, and the scholars note that Allah named her there a believing woman, a praise of her faith. She lived on, unmarried, narrating hadith that we still carry, among them the supplication the Prophet ﷺ taught for one who stops at a place: I seek refuge in the perfect words

of Allah from the evil of what He has created, and whoever says it, nothing will harm him until he leaves. She became a teacher of the next generation, and the righteous caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, who narrated from her, called her the righteous woman.

What this couple's life asks of our faith

It is easy to admire two people like this and leave it there, to file them under "good character" and move on. But their lives are not asking for admiration. They are asking something of our iman.

Look first at Uthman and his protection. He had safety, real safety, handed to him for free, while his brothers were tortured in the sun. He gave it up so that he could stand where they stood, because he had understood that the protection of Allah is better than the protection of any powerful man. That is tawakkul, real trust in Allah, the willingness to let go of a worldly shield because your heart is anchored in a better one. Ask yourself where you have been clinging to your own al-Walid, some comfort or status you are unwilling to risk for the sake of Allah, and whether you believe, as Uthman did, that what Allah guards is safer than what people can give. And the world that he refused to be sheltered by also "took nothing from him," the Prophet ﷺ said. It never altered who he was, never made him harder or greedier, never bought him. Guard one corner of your own character this week that the world is trying to erode, your honesty, your patience, your contentment, and refuse to sell it.

Then look at Khawla, and at sincerity. She arranged the two marriages that gave this ummah Sawda and Aisha, and through Aisha a vast portion of everything we know about the Prophet ﷺ. She could have claimed it for the rest of her life. She did not. She did the good and left the reward with Allah, content that He had seen it. That is ikhlas, the rarest thing: to act for Allah alone and

not need the eyes of people on you. There is a quiet good you could do this week that no one would ever trace back to you. Do it the way Khawla did, in silence, for Allah, and let Him keep the record.

And remember Uthman's heart on the day of that verse. Already among the first to believe, already wounded for Allah, and still his faith surged and his love deepened. However close you feel to Allah, there is more, and it comes to the heart that keeps reaching for Him. Do not let your faith settle. Feed it, and watch it grow.

Finally, hold onto how their story ends. To the streets of Makkah, Uthman might have looked like a man who threw away his protection and died poor in a strange city. But the Prophet ﷺ wept at his side, kissed his forehead, buried him with his own hands and called him brother, and his deeds flowed toward him like a spring. Khawla, the overlooked woman from a small tribe, was praised in the Book of Allah as a believer. Nothing they gave to Allah was lost. That is the promise that should change how you spend your days: what you give to Allah, He keeps; what looks like loss to the world, He may be writing down as the very thing that saves you.

So take one thing from this righteous couple into your ordinary life. Risk one small comfort for the sake of Allah. Guard one part of yourself the world is trying to change. Do one good deed in secret and let Him alone reward it. May Allah be pleased with Khawla bint Hakim and Uthman ibn Madhun, gather us with them in the company of the righteous, and let our faith, like theirs, keep deepening until the day we meet Him.

This chapter follows the account of Khawla bint Hakim and Uthman ibn Madhun (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (16:90). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Al-Miqdad ibn al-Aswad

The First Horseman

There are names among the companions that every Muslim child can recite, and there are names that sit quietly in the margins of the books, mentioned in a list and then passed over. Al-Miqdad ibn al-Aswad (may Allah be pleased with him) belongs strangely to both. His name appears again and again in the most honoured company: among the first seven to declare their Islam openly, among the handful of believers about whom a verse of the Qur'an was revealed, and among four men Allah commanded His Prophet ﷺ to love. And yet ask most Muslims for a single story about him, and they will fall silent. The man behind the name carried a weight of faith that, in the end, asks more of us than admiration ever could.

A fugitive who found a home

He was not born in Makkah. Al-Miqdad came from Yemen, from Hadramawt, from a people the Prophet ﷺ loved and praised for the good nature in their hearts. He was a big man even then, and somewhere in his youth, in the heat of a quarrel with one of his own tribesmen, he struck a blow that killed the man. It was not murder in his heart; it was an accident born of anger. But fear is not careful about such distinctions, and it drove him out of his homeland entirely. He fled north to Makkah, a man with blood behind him and no clan to shelter him.

So he did what a desperate man did in that age. He went from tribe to tribe asking, who will take in a brother from Yemen and give him protection? He came at last to Banu Zuhra, and a man named al-Aswad ibn Abd Yaghuth took him in. What began as protection grew into something deeper. Al-Aswad came to love this Yemeni stranger so completely that he took him to the open ground beside the Kaaba and announced that this man was no longer merely under his protection: he was now his son. From that day he was no longer al-Miqdad ibn Amr, the name his father in Yemen had given him. He was al-Miqdad ibn al-Aswad. That is why, if you search for him, you will find him under two fathers, two histories folded into one life.

He was impossible to overlook. The biographers, who often tell us nothing of how a companion looked, lingered over al-Miqdad: very tall and powerfully built, with a great mass of hair and skin so dark it seemed to shine, his eyes large and round, his nose prominent. Everything about him was emphatic, drawn in bold lines. When he walked into a gathering, you knew it.

The price of an early yes

We do not know the exact day he believed, nor the words he said, but the timing tells you everything. He went to the Prophet ﷺ before the believers had even gathered in the house of al-Arqam, in the very first and most exposed days. He belonged to the lower classes of Makkah, the world of Bilal and Suhayb and Ammar, men with everything to lose and nothing to gain. He believed, and at first kept it hidden, for he was more exposed than almost anyone. He had no tribe of his own, and the man who had adopted him could, with a word, unmake that adoption and leave him utterly alone.

That is precisely what nearly happened. When al-Aswad discovered that his adopted son had become a Muslim, he turned on him in public, dragging him, cursing him, spitting on him before the eyes of Makkah, calling him a curse that had brought ruin to his house. Imagine the cruelty of it: not a stranger, but the one man who had lifted him out of homelessness, now publicly disowning him for the sake of his faith.

Ibn Mas'ud (may Allah be pleased with him), who named the seven who declared their Islam openly, explained what set them apart. Allah protected the Prophet ﷺ through his uncle Abu Talib, and Abu Bakr through his clan, so that Abu Bakr was beaten in private, if at all. But for the other five, al-Miqdad among them, there was no shield. Quraysh would force them into heavy coats of iron, drag them under the burning sun, and beat them. And, Ibn Mas'ud notes, you did not have to own these men, or belong to any great tribe, to strike them: anyone full of rage who passed these five in the street would walk over and beat them like punching bags. In those years there was nothing they could do for Islam except stay near the Prophet ﷺ, learn what little they could, and endure.

Then, like the others, he carried his faith out of reach of his tormentors. He emigrated twice for the sake of Allah, first to Abyssinia and later to Madinah, where the Prophet ﷺ joined him in brotherhood with one of the Ansar, Jabbar ibn Sakhr.

The four whom Allah loves

In Madinah his stature became visible in a way it could not have been in Makkah. There is a narration from Buraydah (may Allah be pleased with him) in which the Prophet ﷺ said that Allah had commanded him to love four people, and had told him that He Himself loved these four: Ali, Abu Dharr, Salman, and al-Miqdad

(may Allah be pleased with them all). The man who had arrived with blood behind him and no clan to claim him was now numbered among four whom the Lord of the worlds had singled out for love.

His marriage tells the same story in a quieter key. One day Abd al-Rahman ibn Awf suggested to him that he should marry, and al-Miqdad, a man known for his heavy jokes, answered, then marry me your daughter. Something in the way he said it displeased Abd al-Rahman, who rose and walked away, and al-Miqdad, stung, took the matter to the Prophet ﷺ, as the companions did with all their small wounds. The answer he received was not a lecture about knowing one's place. The Prophet ﷺ had married off all his own daughters by then, so he said, in effect, come, let me make you my relative. He took al-Miqdad to his own first cousin, Duba'a bint al-Zubayr ibn Abd al-Muttalib, a woman of noble birth and faith, and proposed marriage on his behalf. The grandson of a homeless Yemeni man married into the very house of Banu Hashim. The Prophet ﷺ did not stop to weigh lineage; it was simply his nature.

The one horseman at Badr

His standing with the Prophet ﷺ was not only a matter of love. He fought in every major battle, and at Badr he stood out so sharply that the histories remember him by it. Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) said that on the day of Badr there was only one horseman among them, and that horseman was al-Miqdad. The believers had gone to intercept a caravan and were drawn into a battle they were not equipped for, against an enemy that came with tens upon tens of horses while they had almost none. Al-Miqdad alone rode that day, and so the companions came to call him the first horseman in the path of Allah. The Prophet ﷺ gave

him command of the left flank, trusting both his skill and his nerve.

But the moment from Badr that the books treasure most was not a clash of swords. It came before the fighting, when the believers understood for the first time that they were facing not a caravan but the full army of Quraysh, and one frightened word could have collapsed the resolve of everyone present. The Prophet ﷺ told them they would have to meet the polytheists in battle, and into that fragile silence al-Miqdad rose. He said, by Allah, we will not say to you what the people of Musa said to Musa, "you and your Lord go and fight, we will sit here." No. We will fight on your right and on your left, in front of you and behind you. Ibn Mas'ud, who was there, said that as al-Miqdad spoke, the face of the Prophet ﷺ lit up with joy, and the words spread courage through the gathering like fire through dry grass. Years later Ibn Mas'ud said he wished, more than almost anything, that he could have been the one to bring that light to the Prophet's face. And when the battle was joined, they said that wherever you looked you saw two things: the angels, and the horse of al-Miqdad.

The cup of milk

If only one story of al-Miqdad survives in a book, it is this one, among the most beloved windows into the tenderness of the Prophet ﷺ with those closest to him. There was a day, in the lean years of Madinah, when al-Miqdad and two companions were so hungry that their sight and hearing began to fail. This was not a young man new to faith but a senior companion, a hero of Badr, reduced to that state. No one could host them; everyone was struggling. At their most desperate, the Prophet ﷺ saw them, gathered them, and told them to follow him to one of his rooms. He had no bread, no meat, no dates. All he possessed

was three goats, and their milk was the only provision of his household. He told al-Miqdad to milk them and divide what came: one share for each of the three men, and one saved for himself, for, he said, I am hungry too.

Al-Miqdad did exactly as he was told. He divided the milk four ways, gave his two companions their share, drank his own, and covered the fourth cup, the Prophet's, and set it aside. His companions drank and slept. But al-Miqdad was still hungry, the night wore on, and the Prophet ﷺ did not return. He sat staring at that covered cup. And the whisper came: surely the Prophet ﷺ has passed by the houses of the Ansar by now, surely someone has given him food and drink, he does not need this. The man who had stood unbroken under the iron coats of Makkah and on the field of Badr now found himself wrestling a far smaller and more intimate enemy. Hunger won. He said Bismillah, drank the Prophet's cup, and lay down. And no sooner had he done it than the whisper turned on him. You are destroyed. He will find the cup empty and know you disobeyed him. Better to run before he wakes.

So he lay there in dread under a blanket too small for his great frame. The Prophet ﷺ came in and gave salam as he always did, in a voice soft enough that a sleeper would not wake and a waking person would hear. Al-Miqdad pretended to sleep, his heart pounding. The Prophet ﷺ went to the cup, found it empty, and raised his hands. This is it, al-Miqdad thought; he is about to pray against me. And the Prophet ﷺ said, O Allah, feed the one who fed me, and give drink to the one who gave me drink.

In that instant the whole night turned over. Al-Miqdad leapt up, seized a knife, and rushed toward the goats, desperate now to feed the Prophet ﷺ, until it struck him that slaughtering the milk

goats made no sense. And then he saw it: the udders of all three were full, as if no one had ever touched them. He milked them, bucket after bucket, and carried the milk back, brimming with joy. The Prophet ﷺ never asked why the cup had been empty before. Al-Miqdad simply said, here is the milk, Messenger of Allah. The Prophet ﷺ drank, then told him to drink, and the cup passed back and forth. And then al-Miqdad burst out laughing, laughed until he fell on his back. The Prophet ﷺ looked at him and said, is this one of your jokes, Miqdad? What did you do? Al-Miqdad confessed all of it: the cup he had drunk, the despair, and the door Allah had opened the moment he heard that prayer. The Prophet ﷺ smiled and said, this is nothing but a mercy from Allah, and told him to wake his companions so they too could drink. He had already received what he treasured most, which was not the milk but the prayer of the Prophet ﷺ.

The man who feared his own intentions

Watch what he did with the honour that came his way, because it reveals the centre of the man. The Prophet ﷺ kept choosing al-Miqdad to lead expeditions. But al-Miqdad did not like the way the companions had begun to place their leaders on pedestals, and he feared what it might do to his own sincerity, his ikhlas. So he asked the Prophet ﷺ never to put him in command again, and refused even to lead the prayer as an imam, terrified that his intention might be quietly corrupted by the deference of others. Here was a man who had courted death at Badr, and the thing he guarded most jealously was his heart before Allah.

The same instinct showed in his hatred of flattery. He was once sitting with Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him) when a man came and heaped praise upon the caliph to his face. Al-Miqdad could not bear it. He gathered a handful of pebbles, knelt before

the man, and began to pelt him as though stoning the pillars at Mina. When Uthman asked what he was doing, al-Miqdad answered that the Prophet ﷺ had commanded that when we meet those who shower us with flattery, we throw dust in their faces. Do not let people drown you in praise; do not feed the part of you that hungers for it.

His later years were a long service to Islam after the Prophet ﷺ had passed. He played a key role in the conquests of Egypt and Sham, including the opening of Palestine. He was a reciter of the Qur'an who loved to recite it before and during battle, walking the ranks of the army with that booming voice to steady the men. At Yarmuk, facing an enemy of overwhelming size, Khalid ibn al-Walid sent him to recite Surat al-Anfal to the troops in the rear. And the title by which this chapter remembers him, better than a thousand men, came from Umar ibn al-Khattab himself. When Umar sent reinforcements to Amr ibn al-As in Egypt, he singled out one man by name: al-Miqdad, who was better than a thousand men. Consider what kind of man earns that testimony from Umar.

The most important thing he ever said

Near the end of his life, al-Miqdad said something that speaks to anyone who has read these lives and felt a quiet ache of envy.

A man of the next generation, a student of the companions named Nufayr, sat with him along with others, stunned to be in the presence of the unmistakable al-Miqdad. One of them said the most natural thing in the world: how blessed are these two eyes that looked upon the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. By Allah, we wish we could have seen what you saw. We wish we could have been there.

Al-Miqdad, who hated praise, stood up. And instead of a fond reminiscence, he gave a rebuke that ought to be carved into the heart of every believer who comes after him. What makes you wish to be present at a time that Allah kept you absent from, when you do not know what you would have done had you been there? By Allah, there were people present in the time of the Prophet ﷺ whom Allah threw on their faces into the Fire, because they met him and refused to believe. Would you not rather thank Allah that He brought you into the world knowing only Him as your Lord, believing all that the Messenger ﷺ brought?

Then he told them what it had actually cost. By Allah, he said, we were sent through a time more difficult than any in which Allah sent a prophet, when people had sunk so far into ignorance that they could imagine no religion better than the worship of stones. Then Allah sent the Prophet ﷺ with the Qur'an, the criterion that divided truth from falsehood, and upon that criterion families were split apart. A man whose heart had been opened to faith would watch his own father and brother live and die rejecting the Prophet ﷺ, knowing where that road ended. He knew it himself, in the father who had made him a son and then disowned him. The believers of Makkah were torn from the very families now torturing them, and could find no rest in their hearts for where those they loved were bound. It was about that anguish, al-Miqdad said, that Allah revealed the prayer of the believers:

those who pray, 'Our Lord, give us joy in our spouses and offspring. Make us good examples to those who are aware of You'.

QUR'AN 25:74

The joy they begged for was not wealth or ease. It was the cooling of the eyes that comes only when those you love hold fast to faith. This, al-Miqdad said, is what you envy when you wish you had been there, imagining that seeing the Prophet ﷺ made everything easy. It did not.

He died in Damascus. His will is itself a window into his heart: he left thirty-six thousand dirhams for al-Hasan and al-Husayn, and seven thousand for each of the Mothers of the Believers, his love attaching itself at the very end to the household of the Prophet ﷺ. He left three children who became people of hadith.

What Al-Miqdad's life asks of our faith

It is easy to admire the horseman of Badr and the man Umar valued at a thousand, and to set him on a shelf where he can ask nothing of us. But al-Miqdad himself forbade exactly that. He asks us, across the centuries, to stop wishing we had his life and to start living our own for Allah.

So learn first the lesson he died teaching. Be grateful for the time Allah placed you in. You did not see the Prophet ﷺ, and you imagine that loss as a kind of unfairness; al-Miqdad calls it a mercy. The question is not whether you would have been brave in their age, but what you will do with the share of faith and trial Allah handed you, in this family, in this year. Contentment with His decree begins here, in thanking Him for the life you were given instead of grieving the one you were not.

Then learn the lesson he lived: that the heart is more fragile than the body, and worth more. This was a man who could not be broken by torture or battle, and who very nearly was broken by a single cup of milk and the whisper that followed it. He did not run, as the whisper urged him to. He waited for the Prophet ﷺ, and

Allah turned his lowest moment into a prayer in his favour. When you fail, and you will, the devil's second move is always to tell you that you are finished, that you may as well flee from Allah now that you have slipped. Al-Miqdad teaches you to stay near the door. The mercy of Allah is larger than your worst night.

And learn to guard what he guarded. He feared leadership and refused praise, not out of false modesty but because he understood that the worth of a deed lies in the intention behind it, and that the applause of people is a slow poison to sincerity. That is a fear worth borrowing in an age that records and rewards every visible good. Ask, before the next good thing you do, whether you would still do it if no one would ever know. Do one good today the way al-Miqdad wanted all of his: quietly, for Allah, with no audience and no thanks, seeking nothing but His Face, as the Qur'an describes the believers He refused to drive away:

Do not drive away those who call upon their Lord morning and evening, seeking nothing but His Face.

QUR'AN 6:52

That is the whole arc of his life, from a frightened fugitive begging the tribes for shelter to a man Allah commanded His Prophet ﷺ to love: a heart that wanted Allah alone to see it. May Allah be pleased with al-Miqdad ibn al-Aswad, the first horseman, and grant us the gratitude to cherish the time He has placed us in, the sincerity to work in it for Him alone, and the trust to stay near His door on the night we fail.

This chapter follows the account of al-Miqdad ibn al-Aswad (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (25:74, 6:52).

Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Hamza ibn Abd al-Muttalib

The Lion of Allah

There are companions whose connection to your heart waits for a place. You can read about Hamza ibn Abd al-Muttalib (may Allah be pleased with him) in a hundred books and feel only admiration. Then one day you stand at the foot of Mount Uhud, near the graves of the martyrs, and a guide begins to tell you how the events of that day unfolded, and suddenly you are no longer reading. You are standing where he fell, and the man becomes real.

Because he died so early in Islam, we tend to underestimate who he was. That is a mistake. Some of the scholars said that had Hamza lived, he would likely have been counted among the Rightly Guided Caliphs. The companions understood him to be of the highest rank among them in his love for Allah and His Messenger, his courage, his sincerity, and his leadership. He is the uncle of the Prophet ﷺ, Asadullah, the Lion of Allah and of His Messenger, and Sayyid al-Shuhada, the master of the martyrs. On the Day of Judgement, all of creation will be ranked: the prophets, the truthful, the martyrs. Take every virtue you have ever read about the martyrs, every reward promised to those who gave their lives, and then know that their leader, the one who will stand at the head of all of them as they come before Allah, is this man.

The name that became a life

The people of Banu Hashim did not name their children carelessly, not even in the days before Islam. They named with intention. And Hamza means a lion. More precisely, the Arabs used the word for the lion at a particular moment: not the lion stalking its prey, not the lion roaring before the strike, but the lion that has seized its prey and begun to tear into it, in the fullness of its strength. Hamza was the strength itself.

It is hard to imagine a name fitting a man more exactly. Before Islam, Hamza was tall, strong, handsome, and beloved, a warrior, a hunter, an archer, a wrestler, the kind of man the youth of Makkah looked up to and wanted to be. When he came back into town, people gathered around him and told legends about his strength. He hunted the animals no one else dared to hunt, and among them, fittingly, were lions. Everything about him, in body and bearing, was the lion. And in the end he would become the Lion of Allah.

Why the lion came late

Two of the Prophet's paternal uncles embraced Islam, and two did not. Hamza and al-Abbas believed; Abu Lahab and Abu Talib did not, though the two who refused could not have been more different from one another in the roles they played. Of the two believing uncles, Hamza was the only one to embrace Islam in those first, dangerous years.

He was, in truth, more like a brother to the Prophet ﷺ than an uncle. The two were nursed by the same woman, Thuwaybah (may Allah be pleased with her), which made them brothers through that nursing, and the scholars say they were the same age, or close to it. Years later, when there was talk of who would care for Hamza's daughter after his death and someone suggested the Prophet ﷺ might marry her, he answered that her

father was his brother, for Thuwaybah had nursed them both. He was there at the beginning, near and beloved his whole life.

So why did he not believe at once? Hamza was rarely in Makkah. He was always out in the desert, hunting, exploring, chasing the next adventure, while others stayed in the city to trade and tend to tribal affairs. He was so consumed by his craft that it was as if nothing else in the world counted. When you trace the early scenes of the Prophet ﷺ calling his clan to Islam, Hamza is simply not there; his name does not come up. And beyond that absence, there was a distance of the heart. He was not a man much interested in religion. He drank. He loved his nephew and his brother, but this matter of faith did not click with him, and he meant to keep hunting and leave the rest alone. And it was precisely such a man whom Allah would turn into the most powerful defender of His Messenger.

The day at the Kaaba

Abu Jahl had been escalating. Unable to crush Islam by torturing the weakest believers, those who had no tribe to shield them, he turned at last on the Prophet ﷺ himself, moving from insult to violence. His hostility was not really about truth: he had admitted in private that the Qur'an was miraculous and the character of the Prophet ﷺ superior. His war was tribal, Banu Makhzum against Banu Hashim, my clan against his.

So one day he came upon the Prophet ﷺ at the Kaaba, began to push him around, and threw at him a nasty, cutting insult, the kind that wounds a man through his family. None of the Prophet's kinsmen happened to be near to defend him, and Abu Jahl, sensing his advantage, used the moment to humiliate him before the people.

And it was just then that Hamza was returning from the hunt.

He came back as he always did, heading straight for the Kaaba to sit in the circles, distribute his game, and catch up with people. But before he could settle, a woman who had witnessed the whole scene came out to him. She as much as said to him: here you are, parading your bravery, while your own nephew was treated like that and you did nothing. Hamza asked her what she meant, and she told him everything. Did Muhammad answer him back? he asked. No, she said, he was too dignified to return the insults of the people. And no one, not one of his kinsmen, had stood up for him.

Something broke loose in Hamza. The anger rose into his face until he was sweating with rage. He walked toward the gatherings around the Kaaba, past everyone, greeting no one, and people knew something was wrong. He went straight to Abu Jahl, into the middle of Banu Makhzum, into the heart of the man's own clan, with no fear at all. He took his bow and struck Abu Jahl across the head with it, splitting it open so the blood flowed. When Hamza struck a man, it was a blow that could kill; Abu Jahl, being the size he was, survived. And Hamza stood over him and said the words that would change everything: how dare you insult Muhammad ﷺ when I am on his religion, and I say what he says.

He did not yet know what that religion was, or even what to call it. He said it because he knew it was the thing that would wound Abu Jahl most. The men of Banu Makhzum rose to attack Hamza, and here Abu Jahl, bleeding from his head, did something that tells you how much he feared this man. He told them all to stop, admitting he had gone too far with the nephew. Since when did Abu Jahl, the tyrant, want to calm a fight down? Only because he understood that if a warrior of Hamza's standing turned against

them, they were finished. Until that day, no man of real power had joined the Muslims. Hamza was the first.

A heart settled in the night

Hamza went home, and he did not sleep. He had spoken in a moment of fury, and now he was confused, unsure of what he had done. Shaytan came to him with the old whisper: what about your forefathers? What about Abd al-Muttalib? You have shamed your family by playing at your nephew's religion. The doubt circled him through the night. Did I really just accept the faith of my nephew, or not?

But Hamza believed in a God. His fitra was intact. Beneath the idols, he knew there was one supreme Lord. And so, in the dark, he turned to that Lord and asked Him to put guidance in his heart and settle the matter one way or another. If this is what I am meant to do, he prayed, then let it settle in my heart.

There is a deep lesson here in the divine decree. Abu Jahl, who feared the spread of Islam more than anything, became the very instrument by which it entered the heart of Hamza. The insult he threw to gain the upper hand became the cause of guidance for the man who would become the Prophet's mightiest aid. He thought he was winning; he was being used.

The Prophet ﷺ counseled Hamza to do exactly what he had done in the night: turn to God and ask. Even if you believe God has partners, the counsel went, ask God alone, say "O God, if this is the truth, guide me to it," and watch what happens to your heart. Hamza prayed on it, and then he came to the Prophet ﷺ and said: I testify that you are telling the truth. Proclaim your religion openly, O my nephew, and I will support you. He would

not want the whole world, he said, if it meant returning to what he had been.

The scholars of seerah mark this as a turning point. Before Hamza believed, there had been no real negotiation with the Prophet ﷺ. After he believed, the Quraysh suddenly wanted to talk and to compromise, because they knew that if it ever came to battle, Hamza would cause a bloodbath. Soon Umar would follow. Hamza was the first of that class of powerful men to enter Islam, and the door he opened did not close.

The first flag of Islam

In Makkah, Hamza largely continued as he was, still hunting, still himself, but now a regular of Dar al-Arqam, a student of the Qur'an and of the Prophet ﷺ. He became the de facto guard of that house. If there was a knock at the door or a noise outside, it was Hamza who stood, drew his bow or his sword, and made himself the protection of the believers. Before the migration, while others slipped out of Makkah quietly, he went to the Kaaba and openly called for one last fight before he left. No one answered.

In Madinah his role became unmistakable. The Prophet ﷺ made him the brother of Zayd ibn Harithah (may Allah be pleased with him), and Hamza entrusted Zayd with his will, telling him before the battles what he wished to happen after his death, always ready for the moment Allah would take his life. When the Prophet ﷺ permitted expeditions to recover what the Quraysh had stolen from the believers, it was Hamza he sent first, the first general the Prophet ﷺ ever commissioned and the first to carry the flag of Islam. With thirty men he once intercepted a caravan of three hundred, Abu Jahl among them, and did not flinch at the

numbers. The pattern was plain: when there was a front to lead, the lion led.

Badr, and the gathering storm

Then came Badr, and the world saw what Hamza was in war. He wore on his chest a distinctive ostrich feather, and in battle, where men try to blend into the ranks, that feather meant the opposite. It said: come and fight me, I am not hiding. The scholars saw in it a sign of his courage. He could fight with two swords at once, wielding both with control where another man could barely manage one.

Before the battle began, a man of Abu Jahl's clan swore he would drink from the well the Muslims had occupied or die for it. Hamza met him at once and struck him down, the first man to die at Badr. Then Utbah ibn Rabi'ah came out with his brother and his son, calling for worthy opponents, and Hamza came forward with Ali and Ubaydah ibn al-Harith. Utbah asked who he was, and Hamza answered for himself: I am the uncle of the Prophet, the Lion of Allah and of His Messenger. Utbah named him a noble and worthy opponent, and Hamza killed him. Badr ended in a decisive victory.

But the same victory marked Hamza as a target. When Makkah counted its dead, its elders, Abu Jahl, Utbah, Umayyah, lay among them. The grief in the city curdled into a hunger for revenge. These were people with no notion of the hereafter; pride was all they had, and Badr had crushed it. One woman in particular, Hind bint Utbah, whose father Hamza had killed, became consumed, composing poetry about how she would mutilate his body. So the army that marched to Uhud did not come only with more men and better cavalry. It came with the women of Makkah, singing verses of vengeance, carrying wine

to celebrate over the corpses of the Muslims. They did not merely want to win. They wanted to mutilate.

Uhud, and the spear

When the fighting began, Hamza cut through the enemy, and it is reported that as many as two thirds of the casualties on the other side that day were from his hand alone, perhaps thirty men or more. He was, as one witness described, roaring like a lion through the battle.

His death was no accident of the field. It had been purchased. Wahshi ibn Harb was a slave of Jubayr ibn Mut'im, who promised him freedom on the condition that he kill Hamza, and Hind offered her own reward, asking that Hamza's liver be cut out so she could chew it. Wahshi was an expert with the spear, and he described the day himself. He took no part in the rest of the battle. He hid behind a boulder and kept his eyes on one man, waiting for a single opening. He watched Hamza roar through the enemy until, after one of his strikes, his armor lifted just enough to expose his lower body. There, Wahshi said, was my chance. He threw, and the spear went clean through. And still, such was the strength of the man, Hamza rose and pursued him with the spear through his body, until at last the wound took him, and the master of the martyrs fell.

What was done to him afterward is hard to recount. When the battlefield was left to them, the Quraysh mutilated the bodies of the slain, cutting off ears and noses, and they did this to Hamza most of all. Hind had his liver cut out, and chewed it.

Then the believers returned to the field, and the Prophet ﷺ came to the body of his uncle. The scholars say the way he wept over Hamza that day was unlike his weeping on any other day in his

life. That was his brother, a man bound to his heart since childhood. And yet, even in that grief, his first thought was for another. He sent al-Zubayr to stop his own mother, Safiyyah (may Allah be pleased with her), Hamza's sister, from seeing what he had seen. If I cannot bear this sight, he reasoned, what will it do to her? Safiyyah was already marching to Uhud, searching for her brother, and al-Zubayr could not turn her back until he said: mother, this is an order from the Prophet ﷺ. She had brought two cloths with her, sensing something was wrong, and she sent them forward to shroud him.

The Prophet ﷺ said over the body, "May Allah have mercy on you, my uncle," and praised him: Hamza had always kept the ties of kinship, always brought the family together, always at the forefront of good. There was an Ansari man beside Hamza with nothing to cover him, and the single cloth was not enough for Hamza alone, so the Prophet ﷺ covered part of each man with it. The dead of Uhud were buried, the bearers of the Qur'an given precedence by how much they had memorized. May Allah make us of the people of the Qur'an.

When the believers saw the mutilation, some of the Ansar swore they would do the same to the dead of Makkah, and worse. In that moment of raw pain, standing over his uncle's body, the Prophet ﷺ himself said he would make an example of seventy of them as they had made an example of seventy of the believers. And then Jibril came down with revelation:

If you [believers] have to respond to an attack, make your response proportionate, but it is best to stand fast.

QUR'AN 16:126

Do not do to them what they did to yours, the verse taught. Be patient, and know that the patience itself comes from Allah. The Prophet ﷺ answered, "I will be patient." And so it was that years later, when those same people stood at his mercy in the conquest of Makkah, with every justification to repay them in kind, he chose patience again.

What Hamza's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read about Hamza and feel only the thrill of it: the strength, the courage, the lion who feared no one. But if that is all we take, we have taken the smallest part. His life is not a portrait of a brave man; it is a question put to our own iman.

Begin with the night he could not sleep. Before any of the battles, before the flag and the feather and the duels at Badr, there was a confused man alone in the dark, pulled at by Shaytan, unsure of what he had done, asking his Lord to settle his heart. That is where it started. Not with strength, but with a sincere turning to Allah: O God, if this is the truth, guide me to it. When your own heart is unsettled, when faith feels heavy or unclear, do not wait for certainty to arrive on its own. Ask. Turn to Allah honestly and ask Him to guide you and to settle your heart, and watch what He does with it. Guidance is His to give, and He gives it to the one who asks for the truth and means it.

Then consider what his faith asked of his pride. Hamza was the most admired man in his city, the one everyone wanted to be. Faith did not feed that pride; it redirected it entirely. The same courage that had hunted lions now guarded the door of Dar al-Arqam, and the same strength that had won him a name now carried the first flag of Islam. That is the question for an ordinary life: when Allah calls you to give your time, your reputation, your comfort to His cause, will you guard your image or spend it for

Him? Hamza took everything the world had given him and laid it at the service of his Lord, and counted that the only thing worth having.

And consider how his story ends, because this is the part that should turn your heart most. The man who threw the spear and the woman who chewed his liver both became Muslim, and not merely Muslim: their Islam was described as outstanding. Wahshi became a great warrior for Islam, and used the very same spear to kill Musaylimah the liar, saying he had killed the best of men and then the worst. Hind became a devout believer. Umar himself prayed over both of them when they died. Some of the companions, looking at Wahshi, remembered the verse:

Say, '[God says], My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of God's mercy. God forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.

QUR'AN 39:53

If there was a way back for the killer of Hamza, then there is a way back for you. Whatever you carry, whatever you think has placed you beyond mercy, look at who entered through that door. The mercy of Allah is wider than your worst day. Do not despair of it. Hamza, the master of the martyrs, will meet his own murderer in Paradise, and Allah will be pleased with both. That is how vast His forgiveness is for the one who turns.

So take something from him into your own life this week. Turn to Allah and ask Him, sincerely, to settle one unsettled thing in your heart. Spend something the world taught you to guard, your pride, your time, a little of your standing, quietly for His sake. And if you have been holding a sin between yourself and His mercy,

set it down and ask Him, because the door that opened for Wahshi has never closed. Hamza died so that Islam could live, not for the glory of it, but because faith had settled firmly in his heart and he loved that this religion would go on after him. May Allah be pleased with the Lion of Allah, give us a measure of his courage in turning to our Lord, and gather us behind him in the company of the martyrs and the truthful.

This chapter follows the account of Hamza ibn Abd al-Muttalib (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (16:126, 39:53). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abdur-Rahman ibn Awf

The Trustee of Wealth

There is a kind of man the world thinks it understands at a glance. Wealthy, handsome, dignified, successful at everything he touches: a man like that, we assume, must be hard, must be proud, must be a little in love with his own ease. And then you meet Abdur-Rahman ibn Awf (may Allah be pleased with him), and the assumption falls apart. Here was a man who could turn over a stone, he said, and find gold beneath it, who once came home with a caravan so vast the city of Madinah trembled and feared an attack, and who would still weep over a plate of bread because he feared his good things had come too soon. His whole life is the long answer to a single question the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ once put to his companions: when the treasures of the world open before you, what kind of people will you become?

To understand the weight of that question in his life, you have to begin before there was any wealth to fear, and before he even carried the name we know him by.

A new name, and a glad tiding

Before Islam he was not called Abdur-Rahman. His name was Abd Amr, or by some accounts Abdul-Kabah, servant of the Kabah. The Prophet ﷺ did not rename every person who entered Islam; he left most names as they were. But when a name carried

something pessimistic, something with a bad meaning, or something that made a human being a servant to anything other than Allah, he would change it. And so he gave this man one of the two names he said were most beloved to Allah: Abdur-Rahman, servant of the Most Merciful. His kunya became Abu Muhammad.

He came from Banu Zuhra, and not just any clan: it was the tribe of Aminah bint Wahb, the mother of the Prophet ﷺ himself, so this dignified merchant was tied to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ through his mother's line, one of two among the ten promised Paradise who carried that closeness. His own mother was named ash-Shifa, though little of her story has reached us. What reached us instead is the shape of the man: sharp, hardworking, relentless in business, married into several houses of Quraysh, and already rich long before faith ever touched him.

His trade ran along the routes of Makkah, the winter journey and the summer journey, the caravans that Allah Himself recalls to the Quraysh in His Book:

[He did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure, secure in their winter and summer journeys.

QUR'AN 106:1-2

On one of those journeys Abdur-Rahman went south, to Yemen, for trade. We are used to hearing of companions meeting Christian monks on the road to Syria, men who whispered of a prophet about to rise out of Makkah. Abdur-Rahman met his monk in Yemen. An elder there introduced him, and the monk asked where he was from and why he had come. From Makkah, he said, to trade, for he was a merchant. Then listen to what the monk said: Shall I not give you a glad tiding greater than any

trade you could ever do? And what, asked Abdur-Rahman, could be greater than my trade? A man, the monk told him, is about to arise from the very place you have just left, a man who receives revelation from the Lord of the heavens and the earth, continuing the way of Isa, peace be upon him.

He carried those words back to Makkah, to a close friend named Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him). Have you heard anything of this, he asked. Indeed, said Abu Bakr; it is Muhammad ibn Abdullah. And he took him that very day to the house of Khadijah to enter Islam.

He was among the first ten or fifteen to believe, before the house of al-Arqam ever became a gathering place. Abu Bakr alone, by his wisdom and standing, was the doorway through which more than half of the ten promised Paradise found the Prophet ﷺ. Abdur-Rahman was one of them. He kept his trade routes running and stayed low in Makkah, but persecution still found him, and he was among those who made the first migration to Abyssinia, then returned and waited until the order came to migrate to Madinah. He is therefore one of those rare companions given the distinction of two migrations for the sake of Allah, of the people of the two hijrahs.

Show me the marketplace

The most famous scene of how the Prophet ﷺ paired the emigrants from Makkah with the helpers of Madinah is the scene of Abdur-Rahman and his new brother, Sad ibn ar-Rabi. This pairing was never random; there was a wisdom in every match, and it shows itself when you look at the personalities side by side.

Sad was among the wealthiest men of Madinah, and he held nothing back. My brother, he said, I am the richest of the people of Madinah. I have two of everything. Take whichever you wish. He offered a garden, a half of all his wealth, and then reached the limit of what a generous heart could think to give: I am married to two women, he said; whichever pleases you, I will divorce her, and when her waiting period is complete and she is lawful for you, you may marry her.

This was not the guidance of the Prophet ﷺ, and Abdur-Rahman wanted none of it. He had taken care of himself his whole life, and even now, a refugee with nothing in a strange city whose markets he did not yet understand, he could not bring himself to live off another man's wealth. May Allah bless you in your family and your wealth, he said, but I have no need of it. And then the words that became his signature: just point me to the marketplace, and I will take care of myself.

The markets of Madinah were not friendly ground. Many sat under tribes hostile to the Muslims, and a penniless newcomer could not simply walk in and trade. But Abdur-Rahman studied them the way a businessman studies anything, starting with what was easiest to acquire. Yogurt, butter, dates, whatever came to hand, which he mixed into dishes people wanted, the famous hais among them, and sold. He did well. Then he earned enough to trade in horses, which he had known in Makkah, and then to sell saddles for them. This was the man who said he could turn over any stone and find gold beneath it, not as a boast about his cleverness but as a confession of how Allah had blessed his hand.

It did not take him long to have enough to marry. When he came to the Prophet ﷺ with the scent of perfume on him, dressed well,

plainly happy, the Prophet ﷺ said, what is this, Abu Abdur-Rahman? He had married, he answered, giving his wife a portion of gold as her dowry. The Prophet ﷺ, pleased for him, gave him the words we still repeat at every wedding feast: hold a walimah, even if it is only with a single sheep. May Allah bless you in your family and in your wealth. He was the first of the emigrants we know of to be married in Madinah, and he had built it all himself, never touching his sponsor's gardens or gold.

Wealth that never made him proud

A lesser man would have used his money as a reason to stay clean and safe while others bled. Abdur-Rahman did the opposite. He was present in every battle alongside the Prophet ﷺ, and like all of the ten promised Paradise, he was always found near him, seeking to shield him. At Uhud he held his ground and took more than twenty wounds, some in his leg so severe that he limped for the rest of his life, a permanent mark of the day he stood firm.

He gave as freely as he fought. When the Prophet ﷺ called for someone to finance an expedition, Abdur-Rahman would bring half his wealth and keep half for his household, and he did this again and again; only Uthman ibn Affan (may Allah be pleased with him) ever outdid him in giving.

In the fifth year after the migration, the Prophet ﷺ appointed him to lead a mission, and the moment of his sending is one to picture slowly. The Prophet ﷺ took a turban and wrapped it around the head of Abdur-Rahman with his own hands, placed his hand on his head, and made dua for him. He counselled him to taqwa, to be ever mindful of Allah and ever prepared to meet Him, and to praise Allah for whatever came his way. Then a particular instruction: when you reach those people, invite them to Islam,

and if Allah grants you victory, propose to the daughter of the chief of the tribe, to soften hard hearts and bind people together. Abdur-Rahman did exactly that, and from that marriage came his most prominent son, Abu Salamah, who grew to be one of the seven great jurists of Madinah, a student of Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), the very man who once asked her to describe the prayer of the Prophet ﷺ. A piece of the religion still flows to us through a marriage the Prophet ﷺ advised.

There is a hadith every Muslim should know, born from an argument. After a battle, Khalid ibn al-Walid (may Allah be pleased with him), who had come to Islam late, exchanged sharp words with Abdur-Rahman. The Prophet ﷺ said: do not revile my companions, for if one of you were to spend gold the size of Mount Uhud, it would not equal a handful that one of them spent, nor even half of it. You cannot reach the rank of a man like Abdur-Rahman ibn Awf. The earliest believers held a station the latecomers could not buy with mountains of gold.

The day he led the Prophet in prayer

Of all the honors given to Abdur-Rahman, one stands almost alone. He is the only companion we know of whom the Prophet ﷺ, in full health, prayed behind, and made his prostration behind.

It happened at Tabuk. The Prophet ﷺ was nowhere to be found; he had gone some distance away, and the window of the prayer was closing. Unwilling to risk its time, those present asked Abdur-Rahman to lead, which already tells you the regard they held him in. Bilal (may Allah be pleased with him) gave the call, and Abdur-Rahman began.

Then the Prophet ﷺ returned while they were already in congregation. It was dark. Rather than disturb them, he took his place in the rows and prayed, catching the second unit behind Abdur-Rahman. Imagine glancing over and realising the Messenger of Allah ﷺ is praying behind you. When Abdur-Rahman gave the closing salam, the Prophet ﷺ rose to complete the unit he had missed, and the Muslims, alarmed, began to say SubhanAllah, certain something had gone wrong. For Abdur-Rahman, who did not know whether he had sinned, that single unit must have stretched on forever. Then the Prophet ﷺ finished, turned to them, and put every heart at ease with two words: you did well. You did well. And he reaffirmed the lesson underneath it: pray your prayers on time.

The trustee of our mothers

After the Prophet ﷺ passed away, Abdur-Rahman's generosity took on a tenderness that is hard to read without being moved. He made himself the sole provider for the wives of the Prophet ﷺ, our mothers, the Mothers of the Believers, so that they would never again worry about their needs. It became so well known that he was their caretaker that whenever he sold anything, large or small, a portion went straight to them. Once he sold a piece of land for forty thousand dinars and distributed the whole of it, among the kin of the Prophet's mother, among his widows, and among the poor. When that money reached Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) and she learned its source, she remembered the Prophet ﷺ once telling her that no one would show compassion to his wives after him except the truly righteous. That man was Abdur-Rahman. He also bore the honor of accompanying the wives of the Prophet ﷺ on Hajj.

Talhah ibn Ubaydillah (may Allah be pleased with him), himself famous for generosity, said that the whole of Madinah lived off Abdur-Rahman's charity in one way or another, and he broke it into thirds. A third of the people owed debts to others, and Abdur-Rahman paid them. A third owed their debts to him, and he forgave them. And a third he simply gave to, looking for no repayment ever again. An entire city, somehow, in his debt and owing him nothing.

And then there is the caravan. His trade returning to Madinah was always a scene, but one day the noise and the clouds of dust were so great that the city shook and people feared an attack. It was no army. It was Abdur-Rahman's caravan, seven hundred camels loaded with goods, pouring into the streets. Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) asked what was happening, and was told it was the merchandise of one man, returned from Syria. All of this from a single caravan, she marvelled, and made a dua for him, one some narrations attribute to the Prophet ﷺ as well: O Allah, give him to drink from Salsabil, a spring of Paradise. The same hand that excelled in trade and in spending, distinguished now with a spring in the Garden.

Afraid of his own good fortune

Yet the most striking thing about Abdur-Rahman is not how much he gave but how frightened he was of what he had. This was his zuhd, his detachment, and it ran deep. We were tested with hardship alongside the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, he said, and we were patient. Then we were tested with ease and prosperity after him, and we were not patient. He meant something exact. There is a patience that carries you through affliction, and a harder patience that holds you steady in comfort, against your own desires. He found prosperity the heavier test, and kept giving

partly out of fear that he had broken faith with the covenant of those early days. He carried in his heart a warning the Prophet ﷺ had spoken to the whole ummah: that he did not fear poverty for them, but feared the world opening to them until they competed, then envied, then turned on and hated one another over it. Abdur-Rahman never wished to be the proof of that prophecy.

He also narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said Shaytan has vowed that the owner of great wealth will never escape him by one of three routes: he takes his money without right, or spends it without right, or wealth becomes so beloved to him that he withholds it from its rightful use. Earn wrong, spend wrong, or hoard. Knowing this, Abdur-Rahman was seen making tawaf around the Kabah repeating one dua: O Allah, protect me from the greed of my own soul. He gave so freely and lived so plainly that in a gathering you could not tell this man with the seven-hundred-camel caravan apart from the poorest servant present.

It is recorded that once, while fasting, he was brought food, and he wept. Musab ibn Umayr was killed, he said, a man better than I am, and there was nothing to shroud him but a single garment, and Hamzah likewise. And I am afraid that we are among those whose good things have been hastened for us in this world. On another occasion bread and meat were set before him and he wept again: the Messenger of Allah ﷺ left this world, he said, and he and his family never once ate their fill of barley bread. A man promised Paradise more than once still trembled before his Lord.

A life that overcame the world

He served the ummah long after the Prophet ﷺ: trusted by Abu Bakr, brought into counsel by Umar (may Allah be pleased with

him), the one who settled how Muslims should act when plague struck at Amwas. When Umar was dying, he left the decision of succession to six of the ten promised Paradise, and Abdur-Rahman did one of the things ad-Dhahabi counted among his greatest virtues. He removed himself from the running at once, then spent his vote carefully, walking through the streets and consulting the people, the men, the women, even the children, asking who should lead. After all of it he gave his pledge to Uthman.

Later, when Uthman fell ill and wrote that Abdur-Rahman should succeed him, a man rushed to him in the mosque with the news. Abdur-Rahman went to the space between the grave of the Prophet ﷺ and his pulpit and prayed: O Allah, if Uthman has truly entrusted this matter to me, take me before he goes. He did not want the trial of that power. He died of natural causes a few months later, before any civil strife broke out, around seventy-five years old. At his funeral, Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) said it looked as though the entire ummah had come, and remembering the Prophet's words that Paradise becomes certain for the one the people testify well of, Ali said of him: Paradise has become his.

Before he died he freed great numbers of slaves and willed his wealth away with the same open hand he had lived by: four hundred dinars of gold for every veteran of Badr still alive, because the Prophet ﷺ loved the people of Badr, and a vast share for the widowed Mothers of the Believers. And even after all that giving, his heirs were left with plenty. Ali stood over his grave and said: may Allah have mercy on you, Abu Muhammad. You attained the good of this world, but you overcame its deception, and were never deluded by it.

What Abdur-Rahman's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read about a man with seven hundred camels and conclude that his story has nothing to do with yours. That would be a comfortable way to escape the real lesson. Abdur-Rahman's life is not about how much he owned. It is about who owned his heart, and on that question it puts a quiet, searching demand on our own iman.

Most of us quietly believe that if Allah gave us more, we would be more grateful, more generous, more at peace. Abdur-Rahman lived the truth we would rather not face: that ease is the harder test, not the easier one. He and his companions passed the test of hardship and stumbled, he said, at the test of comfort. The thing to imitate is not his wealth, which most of us will never have, but his fear of his own soul, that single dua circling the Kabah: O Allah, protect me from the greed of my own soul. That prayer belongs to anyone with anything, a salary, a home, a little more than the person beside them. Greed is not a disease of the rich but of the heart, and the heart that asks Allah for protection from it is already turning back to Him.

Learn, too, from how he held his money loosely, as a trust and not a treasure. He cared for widows no one was watching him care for, forgave debts and asked for no thanks, gave half of what he had and feared it was not enough, while many of us give a fraction and feel generous. This is ikhlas, sincerity, in the language of wealth: to spend for Allah alone, without tallying it, without needing it seen. You can do a piece of this today. Pay a debt for someone struggling and never mention it. Give something away that no one will know you gave. Do it for Allah, and let Him be the only witness you need.

And take heart from the fear itself. Abdur-Rahman was promised Paradise, and still he wept over a plate of bread, still he begged to die rather than carry power he did not trust himself with. That is not the anxiety of a man who doubts Allah. It is the humility of a man who holds the hope of Allah's mercy and the fear of His reckoning in the same heart and lets neither one go. The believer a little afraid of being deceived by the world is the believer who is awake; the ones the Prophet ﷺ warned about are the ones who feel perfectly safe.

So measure yourself, gently, against him: not against his caravan, but against his contentment. Spend something for His sake before the day ends. Loosen your grip on one thing you are holding too tightly. Ask Him, as Abdur-Rahman did, to save you from the greed of your own soul, and mean it. That door stays open to the poor and the rich alike. May Allah be pleased with Abdur-Rahman ibn Awf, who gained the world and was never owned by it, and may He grant us hearts that hold what we have lightly, give freely for His sake, and meet Him unburdened.

This chapter follows the account of Abdur-Rahman ibn Awf (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (106:1-2). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abu Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrah

The Trustworthy of This Ummah

There is a kind of man the world rarely notices, because he never asks to be noticed. He does the hardest work and lets another take the credit. He is handed power and tries to give it away. He could live in comfort and chooses an empty room with one pot and a thin pillow. When the histories list the ten companions promised Paradise, his is often the name people forget. Yet the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ looked at the whole of this ummah and chose one man to carry a single title he never gave to anyone else. He stood up in the first row of prayer and called his name. And the title was not warrior, though he was a warrior, nor general, though he led armies. It was trustworthy.

His name was Abu Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrah (may Allah be pleased with him), and to understand why a quiet man earned the loudest praise, you have to walk with him from a tribe nobody feared to a deathbed nobody could forget.

A son known by his grandfather

His given name was Amir ibn Abdullah, and his grandfather was al-Jarrah. We do not call him the son of his father. We call him the son of his grandfather, and that small fact carries weight. The scholars say a man might be named for his grandfather because the grandfather raised him, or was more famous, or, and this is the reason that will haunt the rest of his story, because the father

was known for something so painful the family chose to skip past his name entirely.

He was of Quraysh, but only just. His clan, Banu al-Harith ibn Fihr, was a distant branch, not one of the great houses like Banu Hashim or Banu Umayyah, not powerful, not influential in the politics of Makkah. He carried the dignity of Quraysh without its leverage.

He grew up in a family of archers, and became something extraordinary before he ever fought a real battle. By the age of six he could handle a bow. By twelve, they say, he was more skilled than the most skilled warrior among them. He could shoot a target dead in the center and split it in two, strike a moving mark from horseback, and read the ground itself, telling from the footprints how many men had passed and how long ago. He was, in every measurable way, a complete soldier, prepared for something great long before he knew what it was.

The school of al-Arqam

He was a teenager, eighteen or nineteen, when Islam reached him through Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him). Everything good that came from his life, every battle won, every trust kept, traces back to that one conversation. He was among the earliest handful of believers, and he went straight to the house of al-Arqam, the secret school where the first Muslims learned at the feet of the Prophet ﷺ.

Then the silence falls. His years in Makkah are almost dark to us. We know he was tortured, and that he was patient through it; some accounts say his own father beat him so severely he was nearly killed. He was among those who migrated to Abyssinia, then returned, and later made the great hijrah to Madinah, where

his brother in faith from among the Ansar was the noble Muadh ibn Jabal (may Allah be pleased with him). He earned one of the rare distinctions of the companions, to be of those who made both migrations.

He fought in every battle alongside the Prophet ﷺ, and not merely in the ranks. In each one he held some position of command, a banner, a wing, a charge to lead, and even after the Prophet ﷺ was gone he was always, in some capacity, a general. And alongside the sword he carried the Book, among the first to memorize the Qur'an as it was revealed in Makkah. That combination, the heart full of Qur'an and the arms full of strength, is the whole of the man.

The day his father came for him

Then came Badr, the day the Qur'an calls al-Furqan, the day of distinction, when faith was forced to cut clean through blood. On that field, men met their own families in arms, brothers facing brothers and sons facing fathers. And the narration the later histories preserve about Abu Ubaydah is among the most difficult in all the seerah.

His father, they say, came to Badr with one purpose. Enraged that his son had abandoned the idols, he meant to kill him and offer him up to what he worshipped, and he hunted him across the battle. Abu Ubaydah turned away from him again and again, refusing the confrontation, until at last his father cornered him and left him no choice. In defending his own life, Abu Ubaydah struck the man who gave him his name.

This is a hard thing to read, and the scholars are careful with it, noting that it appears in the later sources rather than the earliest, which casts some doubt on the details. But the meaning of that

moment is reflected in the Book of Allah. Some commentators say it was in answer to believers placed in exactly this agony that this verse was revealed:

[Prophet], you will not find people who truly believe in God and the Last Day giving their loyalty to those who oppose God and His Messenger, even though they may be their fathers, sons, brothers, or other relations: these are the people in whose hearts God has inscribed faith, and whom He has strengthened with His spirit. He will let them enter Gardens graced with flowing streams, where they will stay: God is well pleased with them, and they with Him. They are on God's side, and God's side will be the one to prosper.

QUR'AN 58:22

Faith inscribed on the heart, strengthened by a spirit from Allah. This is what it cost some of them to believe, and this is what Allah promised in return.

Two teeth for the face of the Prophet

If Badr shows what he was willing to lose, Uhud shows what he was willing to give. That was the day the battle nearly broke, when a small ring of companions threw their own bodies around the Prophet ﷺ as the arrows came and the swords swung at him. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ was wounded again and again, knocked into a ditch, his teeth broken, and two links of his iron helmet driven down into the flesh of his cheek by a savage blow.

Someone had to pull them out. Abu Ubaydah came to him, and he did not use his hands. He bit down on the helmet with his own teeth and dragged the metal links out of the Prophet's face. He freed the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and in doing it he tore out two of his own front teeth.

He carried a speech impediment for the rest of his life from that wound. And here is one of the quiet miracles of that moment: those who knew him said his speech became more beautiful after he lost the teeth than before. The gap that should have marred his words somehow sweetened them, as Allah honored what he had done in the service of His Messenger and turned the mark of his sacrifice into something lovely.

The Prophet ﷺ used to praise him often, saying simply, what a man Abu Ubaydah is. And the companions did not forget where he stood. Abdullah ibn Masud (may Allah be pleased with him) named his three closest friends among them as Abu Bakr, Umar, and Abu Ubaydah. And when our mother Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) was asked which companions were most beloved to the Prophet ﷺ, she answered Abu Bakr, then Umar, then Uthman, then Abu Ubaydah, set always beside the greatest.

Every nation has a trustworthy one

The title that defined him came on a particular day. Two Christian leaders had come from Najran to debate the Prophet ﷺ, and when the debate reached its edge they drew back, unwilling to invoke God's curse on the liar between them, for they feared he truly was a prophet. Instead they asked to learn, making one request: send with us a trustworthy man, and none but a trustworthy man.

The Prophet ﷺ told them he would send a man who was strong and trustworthy. The companions' hearts stirred, because every one of them longed to be the one the Messenger ﷺ meant; Umar himself put himself forward, hoping. The next day, as they prayed in the front row and made their presence known, the Prophet ﷺ said, stand up, O Abu Ubaydah, and then said words that would

outlast every battle: every nation has a trustworthy one, and the trustworthy one of this nation is Abu Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrah.

The Amin of the ummah. The scholars note that the Prophet ﷺ never gave one of his own titles to another man, and he himself was al-Sadiq al-Amin, the truthful and the trustworthy. To hand a piece of that name to Abu Ubaydah was praise of a unique and staggering kind, marking him as one faithful to his covenant with Allah, with the Messenger ﷺ, and with the believers, always.

And he wore it the way only the truly trustworthy can: as though it were nothing he had earned and everything he owed. He was tall, powerful, strikingly handsome, but gentle and easy by nature, never raising his voice or dominating a gathering. He was known for his zuhd, his indifference to the world, wearing rough clothes and caring nothing for wealth or comfort. He married little and left almost no family behind, understanding his life as one long deployment in the service of the Messenger ﷺ. Most of all, he had no appetite for leadership, and that emptiness of ambition was the very thing that made him fit to hold it. The Prophet ﷺ taught that leadership is a trust, an amanah, and who is fitter for a trust than the trustworthy?

Once the Prophet ﷺ sent him out with Amr ibn al-As (may Allah be pleased with him) and told them not to quarrel over command. Amr, a recent convert, announced on the road that he was the leader and Abu Ubaydah would follow, though Abu Ubaydah was the senior by every measure. He handed Amr the leadership without argument, even putting him forward to lead the prayer. He would not differ over a thing the world prizes and Allah does not.

The whale, and the empty room

One of the most beautiful accounts of him at sea comes from Jabir ibn Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with him). The Prophet ﷺ sent some three hundred men on a mission to the coast and put Abu Ubaydah over them. Their food ran out. As their general, he rationed what little remained, dividing the dates with care, until each man's share fell to a single date a day. When the narrator asked Jabir how a man could survive on one date, Jabir answered that they only understood its value when even that was gone.

Then they reached the shore, and Allah cast up a whale the size of a mountain. They ate from it for eighteen days and nights, as much as they wanted. It was so vast that a group could sit inside one of its eye sockets, and when Abu Ubaydah set two of its ribs upright like an arch, a rider on a camel passed beneath without touching the top. Allah had fed the trustworthy man and those in his care from a sea they did not know.

There was a greater honor still. When the Prophet ﷺ entered Makkah in triumph, the army came in three columns, each behind a banner, with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ at the front. The man who walked ahead of him, carrying the banner of the center as they entered the city that had once driven the believers out, was Abu Ubaydah. And when they arrived, it was he who knelt the Prophet's camel and pitched his tent. Yet in his humility he never spoke of it; we know of that glorious moment only because others reported it about him. Those most persecuted in Makkah, men like Abu Ubaydah and Bilal, were set in front on the day Makkah was won.

His humility ran all the way to the end. Years later, when Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) was caliph and came to inspect his governors, he asked Abu Ubaydah to take him home. Abu

Ubaydah, by then the supreme commander of all Syria, tried to wave him off: what will you do at my place except weep? When Umar walked in, he found no furniture and no possessions, only a single cooking pot, one pillow, and a little dry food. The commander of an empire lived in an empty room. Umar wept, exactly as Abu Ubaydah had warned. Then he spoke a sentence that is itself a monument: the world has changed all of us, except you, Abu Ubaydah.

The plague, and a man pleased with his Lord

When the Prophet ﷺ passed away and Abu Bakr was chosen at the gathering of the Saqifah, it was Abu Ubaydah and Umar whom Abu Bakr had taken with him, and Abu Bakr offered the people either man as their leader, the Faruq or the Amin of this ummah. That he could even be named in the same breath as a candidate for the caliphate tells you his rank. Allah chose Abu Bakr, and Abu Ubaydah did what he always did: he served.

When Umar appointed him supreme commander in place of Khalid ibn al-Walid (may Allah be pleased with him), the letter reached Abu Ubaydah in the middle of a battle. He did not announce it; he waited until the fighting was done, so as not to disturb Khalid's plan, and only then quietly told him. When Khalid, moved, asked why he had not spoken at once, Abu Ubaydah answered that he did not seek the leadership of this world; they were brothers for the sake of Allah. The two became a remarkable pair, Khalid the relentless commander, Abu Ubaydah the patient negotiator, and together they opened Damascus from two directions at once. As governor of Syria he built mosques and hospitals, and when famine struck Madinah in the Year of Ashes, he sent four thousand camel-loads of food to relieve his

people. Umar loved him so deeply that, though he was caliph, he would kiss Abu Ubaydah's hand when he saw him.

Then the plague of Amwas broke out. Abu Ubaydah had come to meet Umar at the edge of Syria when word arrived that people were dying right and left. Umar consulted the veterans of Badr and decided to return to Madinah. Abu Ubaydah, pained, asked him: are you fleeing from the decree of Allah? And Umar gave the answer that has echoed ever since: we flee from the decree of Allah to the decree of Allah. Then Abd al-Rahman ibn Awf reported the Prophet's teaching that one should not enter a land where plague has struck, nor leave a land where it strikes while one is in it.

Umar returned. Abu Ubaydah stayed with his army, and the plague began to take them. Knowing how much the ummah needed this man, Umar wrote: I have urgent need of you; when this letter reaches you, come to me in Madinah. Abu Ubaydah understood at once that Umar was trying to save his life, and he wrote back a letter that breaks and heals the heart at once. He would not abandon his soldiers. He was pleased with the decree of his Lord; if he died in this plague it was martyrdom, and he would be content, for he himself had narrated from the Prophet ﷺ that whoever dies of the plague is a martyr. When Umar read it, he wept, and when those around him thought Abu Ubaydah must already have died, he said, not yet, but it will not be long.

The plague came for him. As his soldiers gathered around their dying commander, he gave them his last counsel: Allah has written death upon the children of Adam, and so all of us will die; the wisest among us is the one most humble before his Lord and most prepared for the hereafter. He appointed Muadh ibn Jabal, his brother of the hijrah, to lead them, and he died. Muadh wept

and called him a man truthful to his Lord, in whose heart Allah was great. And when the news reached Umar, he wept too, and said the highest thing he ever said of any man: had Abu Ubaydah lived, I would have appointed him my successor, and I would have met my Lord in peace. He used to wish for a room full of men like Abu Ubaydah, for the gold of this world could be counted and a man like him could not.

What Abu Ubaydah's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read of a man who emptied his house for Allah and bit iron from the face of the Prophet ﷺ and feel only awe, to place him so high above us that he asks nothing of our small days. That would be a waste of his life. He is not a statue to admire; he is a question put quietly to your own iman.

He was trustworthy, and that word is larger than honesty. To be amin is to be safe to rely on, faithful with what Allah has placed in your hands, whether wealth, a duty, a secret, a family, or a reputation, and to discharge it for Allah even when no one is checking and no one will ever know. Ask yourself where you are entrusted right now: the work you were hired to do, the money that passes through you, the people who depend on you, the word you gave. Faith is not only what you believe in the heart; it is whether Allah can trust you with what He has given. Be the one who returns the trust intact, for His sake, in the ordinary places where it would be so easy to cut a corner and call it nothing.

He sought no position, and that is the harder mirror. We are taught from every direction to want to be seen, to claim the credit, to lead the line. Abu Ubaydah handed leadership away, walked ahead of the Prophet ﷺ into Makkah and never bragged of it, governed a country from a room with one pot, and Umar said the world had changed everyone but him. The world

changes us through our wanting; he stayed unchanged because he wanted Allah, and almost nothing else. This is ikhlas, sincerity, the quiet refusal to perform your good deeds for an audience. Begin today by doing one good thing that no one will ever attribute to you, and letting that be enough, because Allah saw it.

And he was pleased with the decree of his Lord when that decree was death. He would not flee the plague at the cost of his men, and he met it content, knowing that if he died it was martyrdom. That contentment was built over a lifetime of giving things up for Allah, until there was nothing left in his hands to clutch, because his peace was never in his circumstances but in his Lord. When hardship comes to you, and it will, his life asks whether your trust in Allah can survive the loss of the very thing you fear to lose. Rida, contentment with Allah's decree, is not pretending the pain is small. It is knowing the One who decreed it is good, and that what you give up for Him is never lost.

So take him into an ordinary week. Be reliable for Allah in one place where it costs you. Do one hidden good with no name on it. Meet one disappointment by saying, truly, I am pleased with my Lord. That is how the Amin of this ummah lived, faithful, unseen, and content, and it is a path still open to anyone who would rather be trusted by Allah than praised by people. May Allah be pleased with Abu Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrah, grant us a measure of his trustworthiness and his contentment, and gather us among those with whom He is well pleased.

This chapter follows the account of Abu Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrah (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (58:22). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most

widely reported has been followed, and where a report is weak it has been noted as such.

Sawda bint Zama'a

The Joy of the Year of Sorrow

There is a kind of greatness that hides itself. It does not narrate. It does not sit at the center of the great disputes. It withdraws so completely that even the date of its death is lost, scattered across a span of thirty years, because the one who lived it never thought herself worth recording. Sawda bint Zama'a (may Allah be pleased with her) was a Mother of the Believers, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and for three full years the only wife in his home. And yet she is among the most overlooked of those mothers, so quiet that students learning their names would forget hers first. Read her story slowly and you begin to suspect this was no accident, that the obscurity was something she chose, a privacy she guarded the way others guard their fame. She wanted a small life, lived for Allah, and she got exactly that. And inside that small life is a lesson large enough to change how an ordinary believer carries their days.

A woman with roots in two cities

Her father was Zama'a ibn Qays, of the clan of Amr ibn Luhay, the man who first brought idols to Makkah, a powerful house and the same clan the mother of Khadijah had come from, so Sawda was by blood a relative of the first Mother of the Believers. Her mother, ash-Shamus bint Qays, came from the Najjar clan of the Khazraj in Madinah, a line that included the mother of Abdul-Muttalib, so Sawda was related to the Prophet ﷺ himself. She

was born, in other words, with strong family in both Makkah and Madinah, and when the day came to embrace Islam, that web of kinship became a wall around her, a protection from the torture that fell so brutally on the weak and unprotected. She would suffer, but not in the body. Her trial would be loss and loneliness, not the whip. The histories describe her as tall and large, of a commanding presence, and about five years older than the Prophet ﷺ, so the first two women he married were both older than he was.

The first batch, and the price of believing early

Before she ever met the Prophet ﷺ as a husband, Sawda was married to as-Sakran ibn Amr, brother of Suhayl ibn Amr, one of the great chiefs of Quraysh who would negotiate against the Muslims at Hudaibiyyah before Allah guided him to Islam. Her family was bound to some of the most prominent and most hostile figures in Makkah.

Sawda and as-Sakran were among the very first to believe. They embraced Islam in the days of the house of al-Arqam, that earliest, smallest, most dangerous circle around the Prophet ﷺ, and they were disowned for it at once. Her brother Malik ibn Zama'a became Muslim early and, with his wife Umayra, migrated to Abyssinia and then to Madinah, among that honored few who migrated twice for the sake of Allah. But her other brother, Abd ibn Zama'a, at first stood firmly against the Prophet ﷺ and against his own brother and sister, coming to Islam only much later. Faith does not arrive in a family on a single day, and Sawda, surrounded by both the early and the slow, did not abandon those who lagged behind. The patience of the early believer with the slow heart of a brother is its own kind of worship.

The dream in a far country

Sawda and as-Sakran made the migration to Abyssinia together, and there they had a son, Abdur-Rahman, her only child born in Islam, who would grow into a great companion and warrior and be martyred years later at the Battle of Jalula against the Persians, in the time of Umar (may Allah be pleased with him). So from this quiet woman came a martyr in the path of Allah.

It was in Abyssinia, too, that Sawda saw the first of two dreams. The Prophet ﷺ came and knelt beside her, near her neck. She woke unsettled and told her husband, and as-Sakran gave her an interpretation that must have sounded impossible: "If your dream is true, then I am going to die soon, and the Prophet ﷺ will marry you." She refused the idea: they were companions, both healthy, far from Makkah, with a child between them, and she pushed the thought away. The next night she dreamed again, and this time the moon descended from the sky, came into her home, and settled beside her. Again she told as-Sakran, and again he answered with the same strange calm: it seems I do not have long, and the Prophet ﷺ will marry you.

And then it came to pass exactly as he had read it. As-Sakran died in Abyssinia, one of the earliest companions of the Prophet ﷺ, a man of whom we know almost nothing except that he believed when believing cost everything, that he was the husband of a future Mother of the Believers and the father of a martyr, and that he had heard a dream point to his own death without flinching, a man who had already surrendered the outcome of his life to Allah.

What followed was the slow hardship of a life suspended. Sawda was now a widow in a foreign land in her fifties, a convert cut off by her own family, with a young son, as many as five older

children, and an old, blind father, and no one to help her. She waited in Abyssinia until she could return to Makkah with members of her late husband's tribe, and there she settled, an outsider in her own city, shielded by her connections from the worst of the persecution but with no future anyone could see. By the reckoning of her society she was not a woman who would marry again. So she set her face toward a long widowhood, planning to raise what children remained and pass from the world unnoticed, seeking nothing but the reward of Allah. There is no record of her complaining. Disowned, widowed, stranded, and forgotten, she folded all of it into a patient hope in her Lord.

The Year of Sorrow, and a house that needed laughter

Meanwhile, in Makkah, the Prophet ﷺ had entered the darkest stretch of his life. He had lost Khadijah, the love of his life, and within days his uncle and protector, Abu Talib, and he had walked out to Ta'if and been driven back with the cruelest rejection he ever faced. The histories call this Aam al-Huzn, the Year of Sorrow, and he carried that grief for months. At home he had two young daughters, Umm Kulthum and little Fatimah, and no one to help him care for them. He was fifty years old, and for twenty-five of those years he had been married to Khadijah alone.

Into this grief came Khawla bint Hakim (may Allah be pleased with her), the community's maker of matches. She named the sorrow she could see on him, and he answered with words that close the door on any rivalry forever: Khadijah was the mother of his children, the keeper of his home; who could ever take her place? No one would. And yet life had to continue, and two small girls needed a mother. So Khawla offered two names: a young girl, Aisha, the daughter of Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with

them both), too young yet to begin a married life, and Sawda bint Zama'a.

Why Sawda? The answer is the whole of her. She was among the first to believe, she had suffered for it, and through all of it she remained a person who brought joy wherever she went, who never quarreled with anyone, easygoing and loving and full of humor. The Prophet ﷺ was drowning in grief, and what his house and his daughters needed was laughter and warmth and a steady, gentle heart. That was Sawda, and her greatest gift was offered to him in the very year he needed it most.

The proposal, and a brother at the Kaaba

The Prophet ﷺ gave Khawla permission to approach both families. She asked Sawda whether she would like Allah and His Messenger ﷺ to bestow a great blessing upon her, and when Sawda asked what it was, Khawla told her of the proposal. Sawda was astonished, this widow in her fifties who had quietly closed the book on marriage, and she answered yes, with her whole heart. Her elderly blind father, overjoyed at the nobility of the match, gave his blessing; her brother-in-law gave her in marriage for a dowry of four hundred dirhams.

But one shadow fell across the day. Sawda's brother Abd ibn Zama'a, still then an enemy of the Prophet ﷺ, was outraged. He went to the Kaaba, poured dirt over his own head, and began slapping himself and crying out in protest that the Prophet ﷺ had married his sister. Years later, after Allah had guided him to Islam, he could barely bear the memory, and he used to say, "I was a silly man," and shake his head that he had stood before the Kaaba mourning the day the Messenger of Allah ﷺ became his brother-in-law. He would die a Muslim, carrying that memory as a

lesson in how differently the same act looks through the eyes of faith.

Here is the detail that should rearrange everything you assumed about this overlooked woman. For three years, Sawda was the only wife of the Prophet ﷺ. Aisha's marriage had been contracted, but she was still too young to come to his home. So through one of the most pivotal stretches in human history, Sawda alone stood at his side. She was his only wife at Al-Isra wal-Mi'raj and his only wife at the Hijrah, and when he built the first of the small homes beside the mosque in Madinah, hers was the only one occupied by a wife of his. She was woven into the seam of history at its turning, and almost no one remembers she was there. The greatness was real. The fame simply never came, because she never sought it.

Scenes from a life beside the Prophet ﷺ

A few scenes survive, and each shows the same woman. At Badr, her former brother-in-law Suhayl ibn Amr was taken prisoner fighting against the Muslims and brought, bound, to the house of Sawda. She looked at him in his humiliation, and the old family loyalty rose up before she could think: "Abu Yazid, you surrendered too easily. You should have fought until you died a noble death." For a moment she had forgotten he was the enemy of the Muslims. The Prophet ﷺ heard her and asked, gently, whether she was rousing a man to fight against Allah and His Messenger ﷺ, and when she caught herself and apologized, he smiled at her to put her at ease.

It was through Sawda, too, that one of the verses of hijab came down. She had gone out, as the wives of the Prophet ﷺ did, to the open areas, and Umar recognized her and called out that he

knew her, hoping the command of hijab would be revealed. The Prophet ﷺ did not answer until Allah sent down the verse. So the screen that would shield the Mothers of the Believers came, in part, in response to a moment in Sawda's quiet life.

And then there is the laughter, which was her signature. When Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) came of age and moved into the home, she did not see Sawda as a rival but loved her like an older sister, and said there was no woman whose company and example she preferred. From Aisha, our mother, come the stories of the lighter side of that blessed home. Once Sawda, seeing the Prophet ﷺ weighed down by sorrow, told him, "O Messenger of Allah, I prayed behind you last night, and you stayed so long in the bowing that I had to hold my nose for fear the blood would come pouring out of it." The Prophet ﷺ laughed until his back teeth showed, and the sadness lifted from his face.

Once Aisha had made a dish and Sawda would not eat it, and Aisha, half joking, smeared the food on her face. The Prophet ﷺ, laughing, told Sawda to return the favor, so she put some on Aisha's face, and the whole house dissolved into laughter, the Prophet ﷺ among them, until they heard Umar coming and composed themselves. Another time the household had spoken so much about the Dajjal that Sawda grew genuinely afraid and hid in a corner, and when the Prophet ﷺ found her there he too came out laughing. It is a side of that home we rarely let ourselves see, and Sawda was its source.

Generosity that never paused to look

After her laughter, the quality most attached to Sawda is her charity. Aisha said she was the most generous of people. Anything that came to her she gave away at once for the sake of Allah, often as gifts for young girls who were getting married.

When Umar once sent her a sack of dirhams, she did not even look inside it; she simply kept passing it out until it was gone. Whatever reached her hand was already on its way to someone else's, given for Allah, never tallied, never weighed.

As the years passed she grew old, and she went to the Prophet ﷺ and told him, with her plain honesty, that she was past the season of being a wife in that sense. The Prophet ﷺ offered to release her from the marriage so she would not feel its burdens. And here Sawda said the thing that reveals the whole secret of her heart. She did not want to be divorced. Keep me as your wife, she said in effect, but I give my night to Aisha, for I want to be resurrected on the Day of Judgment as one of your wives. She gave up her turn out of love for Aisha and to seek the Prophet's ﷺ pleasure, but she would not surrender the one thing she wanted above everything: to dwell in Paradise as his wife. Everything in this world she would give away without looking; this alone she held with both hands.

It was her age, too, that brought a mercy still felt by the whole ummah. On the farewell Hajj, unable to move quickly through the crowds, she asked the Prophet's ﷺ permission to leave Muzdalifah early, and he granted it and took her and some of the elderly and the women out ahead of the crowd, a permission that has eased the path of countless weak and elderly pilgrims ever since. She never made the pilgrimage again, and after the Prophet ﷺ died she rarely left her home at all.

A death as quiet as the life

When the other wives of the Prophet ﷺ outlived him, many became teachers, none more than Aisha and Umm Salama. Sawda took a different road. She narrated only about five hadith, though she had been at his side through the Night Journey, the

Hijrah, Badr, and the years of Madinah. She stayed in her home, gave away whatever came to her, and lived out her days in private worship.

She was so withdrawn that the histories cannot even fix the year of her death; the reports span some thirty years. She was certainly past eighty, and she could have slipped out of the world at almost any point in that long, quiet stretch, as softly as she had moved through it. Her generosity reached past her own death: she asked that her room be merged with Aisha's, to give her beloved Aisha more space. When she died there was not a single complaint anyone could raise against her; everyone remembered only her warmth and her open hand. When the news reached Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him), he fell into prostration, for he had heard the Prophet ﷺ say that one should prostrate at a sign, and what greater sign could there be than the death of a wife of the Prophet ﷺ? Her funeral, like her life, was not grand. She was selfless in living and in dying, and the one thing she had asked for, to be a wife of the Prophet ﷺ in the highest Paradise, is written with Allah, exactly as she requested it.

What Sawda's life asks of our faith

It is easy to admire the loud forms of greatness, the ones with battles and speeches and long lists of narrations. Sawda offers a quieter and, for most of us, a more reachable kind. Her life is not a monument to gaze at from below; it is a question pressed against our own iman: could you do good for Allah if no one ever knew, and be content?

Begin with her sincerity, her ikhlas. Sawda gave away everything that reached her, a sack of dirhams unopened, gifts passed to brides, her own turn with the Prophet ﷺ surrendered to a woman she loved, and she kept no ledger of any of it. She wanted no

name and no record, and she so thoroughly hid herself that history lost the date of her death. And yet what she truly wanted, she received in full: a place among the wives of the Prophet ﷺ in Paradise. So much of what we do is angled, however slightly, toward being seen. She shows us another way: to do the deed for Allah alone and be content that He has seen it, even if not one other soul ever does. Ask how much of your good would survive if the audience were removed, then go and do one thing today that only Allah will know about.

Take her joy as worship. We do not usually think of cheerfulness as an act of faith, but in the Year of Sorrow, Sawda's laughter was a mercy sent into the house of the Prophet ﷺ by Allah. She lifted him when grief sat on his chest; she made a heavy home light. This too is good done for the sake of Allah: to bring ease to the people around you, to be the one who never quarrels and never wounds, to carry a spirit so gentle that no one can find a complaint against you when you are gone. Among people who are tired and burdened, the believer who brings genuine joy is doing something quietly sacred. You can begin today, with one person who is low.

Learn her patience and her contentment with Allah's decree. She was disowned, widowed in a foreign land, stranded, aging, and forgotten, and she did not turn bitter. She accepted what looked like a closed and shrinking life and spent it in patient hope of her Lord, and Allah opened it into something she could never have imagined. When your own life narrows, when the doors seem to close, her example asks whether your trust in Allah is large enough to wait in the dark without complaint, sure that the One who decreed it has not forgotten you.

And hold, as she held, to the one thing that matters most. Sawda gave away the whole world without a second glance, but her share of the Prophet ﷺ in the Hereafter she would not let go. She knew the difference between what is passing and what is permanent, and she clung to the permanent with everything in her. Let her teach you to loosen your grip on what fades and tighten it on what lasts: your prayer, your sincerity, your place with Allah.

So take one thing from her into your own ordinary days. Give a gift no one will know you gave. Lighten one heavy heart for the sake of Allah. Meet one hardship with patience and no complaint to your Lord. Set your hope, as she did, not on the lists of this world but on a place near Him in the Hereafter. That is how the quiet Mother of the Believers lived, in privacy, in sincerity, in joy, in trust, and it is a way still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Sawda bint Zama'a, grant us a measure of her sincerity and her contentment, and gather us with her and her husband, our beloved Prophet ﷺ, in the highest Paradise.

This chapter follows the account of Sawda bint Zama'a (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed; the verse of hijab connected to her is referred to in prose rather than quoted, as the lecture does not cite a specific verse.

Saalim Mawla Abu Hudhaifa

The Imam of the People of the Qur'an

If you said the name Salman al-Farsi, Salman the Persian, almost every Muslim would know exactly whom you meant. But if you said Saalim al-Farsi, Saalim the Persian, very few would recognise the name at all. The two men shared a homeland, and they shared the dignity of having come to Islam from far outside the Arab tribes. There the resemblance ends. Salman knew his father, a chief among the Persian clans. Saalim knew almost nothing of his own. His family is unknown to us. His life before Islam is a blank page. He arrives in the histories as a freed slave, with no lineage, no wealth, and no tribe to stand behind him.

And yet this man, who by every measure the world used to weigh people had nothing, would be named by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as one of only four people from whom the Qur'an should be learned. He would lead the most senior companions in prayer in two cities. And when the second Khalifah of Islam lay dying, he would say that had this man still been alive, he would have made him his successor. His story is not long. But it shows, more clearly than almost any other, what Islam came to do to the human heart: to lift a person to their full worth before Allah, no matter where the world had placed them.

A man with no name of his own

Saalim (may Allah be pleased with him) was the freed slave of Abu Hudhaifa (may Allah be pleased with him), and Abu Hudhaifa did something with him that the people of Makkah would have found almost impossible to imagine. He married him to his own niece, Fatima bint al-Walid ibn Utba.

To feel the weight of that, you have to know who this family was. Abu Hudhaifa's father was Utba ibn Rabia, his uncle was Shayba, and his older brother was al-Walid, and all three of them would later stand against the Muslims on the field of Badr. They were chiefs of Quraysh, men of the highest standing. Fatima, the daughter of al-Walid, had made the hijrah to Madinah and embraced Islam, leaving that proud house behind. She was known for her beauty, known for her wealth, and counted among the very best of the unmarried women who had migrated. By the standards of that age, any of the noble companions would have been honoured to marry her, and any family would have wanted to be tied to her line.

Abu Hudhaifa gave her to Saalim. Not a man from a lesser tribe, but a man with no tribe at all, no wealth at all, no known ancestry at all. This was the ihsan, the deep goodness, that Abu Hudhaifa showed him: he brought Saalim fully into his household and treated him as a son. And because the custom of adoption had been changed by revelation, Saalim did not take a new lineage the way Zayd ibn Haritha had once been called by another name. He did not become the son of anyone. He simply remained Saalim, the freed slave of Abu Hudhaifa. The bond between the two men was so real that this name, tying him to Abu Hudhaifa, stayed with him through everything.

The companions did not quite know what to call him at first. Some called him Saalim the righteous, or Saalim, one of the

righteous people, because his status among them was a thing of character rather than birth. In the end they settled on Saalim, the freed slave of Abu Hudhaifa, because that relationship outlasted every other description of him.

The voice they all turned to

There is one thing you cannot speak about Saalim without speaking about, and that is the Qur'an. Set aside his unknown family and his nameless background, and what remains is a man utterly bound to the Book of Allah. He was among those whose recitation was the most beautiful of all. People loved to hear his voice. The Prophet ﷺ himself loved to hear Saalim recite. In any gathering, when the companions wished for the Qur'an to be read aloud, they would turn and look at Saalim, and say: let him read.

His memorisation was at its peak, and his understanding moved alongside it. The Prophet ﷺ said: take the Qur'an from four people. He named Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Mu'adh ibn Jabal, and Saalim, the freed slave of Abu Hudhaifa (may Allah be pleased with them all). To be placed among those names is to be placed among the great teachers of the Book in the first generation, the ones whose recitation and whose grasp of the meanings and the contexts of revelation were to be trusted and passed on.

Think for a moment about who the other three were. Towering figures, companions whose names every student of this religion learns early. And beside them stands Saalim, a freed Persian slave, named by the Prophet ﷺ as one of the four sources of the Qur'an for the whole ummah. The world had handed him nothing. Allah handed him this.

The Imam of the Muhajirun and the Ansar

In Makkah, in the earliest and most dangerous years, the companions would gather to pray in the house of al-Arqam. When the Prophet ﷺ was present, he led the prayer. But when he was not there, it was Saalim who stood in front and led the rest of the companions. So if you want to name the Imam of the Muhajirun in Makkah, the one who led the believers in prayer in the house of al-Arqam, it was Saalim, a freed slave with no weight at all in the eyes of the people of that age.

His standing was a strange and telling thing. Because he was the freed slave of Abu Hudhaifa, he carried the protection of that powerful clan. People who looked down on his lineage still had to deal with him with a certain care, because Abu Hudhaifa loved him and stood behind him. So Saalim moved through circles that should have been closed to a man of his background. He was looked down upon for his birth and his poverty, and yet there he was, in the very heart of the community, leading its prayers.

When Abu Hudhaifa migrated to Abyssinia, Saalim migrated with him. And when the believers came at last to Madinah, the distinction only grew. The Prophet ﷺ had sent companions ahead to Quba, on the edge of the city. The one appointed to lead the prayer there, for the migrants from Makkah and the new believers of Madinah together, was Saalim. Among those who prayed behind him in Quba were senior companions, men like Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him). Saalim led them until the Prophet ﷺ himself arrived and took his place.

So this freed Persian slave was the Imam of the Muhajirun in Makkah and the Imam of the Muhajirun and the Ansar in Quba. The man the world counted as nothing led the best of humanity in standing before Allah.

A carrier of the Qur'an held to a higher standard

What is most striking about Saalim is that he never treated his memorisation as an ornament, something to be displayed in a gathering or carried as a private source of pride. He understood the Qur'an as a weight laid upon him, a thing that raised the bar for his own conduct.

Whenever he saw a good deed in front of him, or something that needed doing, he would say to himself: woe to me, a carrier of the Qur'an, how could I not do this? And whenever he saw something forbidden or harmful, and saw others fall into it, he would say: woe to me, I am a carrier of the Qur'an, I must hold myself to a different standard. The Book he had memorised was not in his throat alone. It governed his hands and his choices.

If you carry the Qur'an, or you wish to, sit with that for a moment. Saalim did not let the honour of memorisation sit separate from the rest of his life. He turned it into an obligation upon his character. He measured what he did and what he refused to do against the fact that the words of his Lord lived inside him. That single conviction, if a person truly held it, would change everything about how the ummah carries its huffaz.

Beautify the Qur'an with your deeds

This conviction was tested on the day of Yamamah. Saalim had fought in every battle alongside the Prophet ﷺ, always with Abu Hudhaifa, and in every battle he was known for his courage. He was among those who never fled, who pushed forward into the danger rather than away from it.

The battle of Yamamah was fought against Musaylima, the man who had falsely claimed prophethood. It was a brutal fight, and the believers were greatly outnumbered. So many of the people

who had memorised the Qur'an would fall in that battle that it became the reason Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) ordered Zayd ibn Thabit (may Allah be pleased with him) to gather the Qur'an into a single written volume. Until then there had been no fear for it, because so many hearts held it whole. The Qur'an had always been written down in the time of the Prophet ﷺ, kept in loose pages, later gathered in the house of Hafsa (may Allah be pleased with her). But the deaths at Yamamah awoke a new concern, and so it was decided to commit the whole of it to writing as a safeguard. Allah had promised to preserve His revelation, and He preserved it through the hearts of these men before their tongues and before their pens.

Saalim insisted on the front lines. He pushed forward, and forward, and forward. He was near Zayd ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), the brother of Umar, of whom Umar would later say: he beat me to two things, he became Muslim before me and he was martyred before me. Around Saalim the companions began to fall, one after another, struck by spears and arrows, overwhelmed by the enemy's numbers.

And in the middle of it, Saalim raised his voice and called out to the reciters of the Qur'an around him: O people of the Qur'an, beautify the Qur'an with your deeds. Now is the time to show the beauty of your recitation. Not in a hall, not in a gathering, but here, where it costs everything. He took his pride in this one thing, that they were the people of the Qur'an, and he called them to prove it with their actions when proving it was hardest.

Then he turned the same blade upon himself. He said: what a wretched carrier of the Qur'an I would be if the Muslims were attacked from my direction. He would hold his ground. He would

not be the gap in the line. He guarded his place so that no harm would reach the believers through him, because he could not bear to be a carrier of the Qur'an who failed the Muslims at the moment of testing.

The last verse, and the last request

As Saalim pressed forward, he was carrying the banner, and his right hand was severed. He took up the flag with his left while the blood poured from his right arm, and he began to recite:

Many prophets have fought, with large bands of godly men alongside them who, in the face of their sufferings for God's cause, did not lose heart or weaken or surrender: God loves those who are steadfast.

QUR'AN 3:146

This was his motto as he advanced, the word of Allah on his tongue at the very edge of his life. He was struck again, in the chest, as he called out those words, and he fell. When the companions reached him, the blood was flowing from him and he could barely speak. A man in his last breaths.

His first question was not about himself. He asked: what happened to Abu Hudhaifa? After every battle, the family accounts for itself, and for Saalim, family was Abu Hudhaifa. They told him: Abu Hudhaifa has been martyred. Saalim knew how deeply Abu Hudhaifa had longed for martyrdom. And then, with what little voice he had left, he made one request. Can you put me close to him?

He was dying, and what he wanted was to be near the man who had taken him as a son, a brother, a companion, the one who had entered Islam alongside him before the house of al-Arqam had

even opened. They answered: Saalim, he was martyred in the very same place. He is already right beside you. Without any plan, Abu Hudhaifa had fallen in battle right next to him. Saalim, looking up with the blood leaving him, had not even noticed how close his companion lay.

Picture the two of them on the ground together. One had been born to the highest station this world could offer, the other had been counted among the lowest. Now both were given the one rank that truly mattered, the rank of the shuhada in the sight of Allah. When they told Saalim that Abu Hudhaifa was beside him, he smiled, and he died. He was so glad that the last thing he had asked for had been granted. Together they had entered Islam, together they had been inseparable, and together they were buried, side by side.

There is one more thing. When Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) himself lay dying, he named a few men he would have appointed to lead the ummah had they still been alive. He mentioned Abu Ubayda ibn al-Jarrah. And he mentioned Saalim, the freed slave of Abu Hudhaifa. Had Saalim been alive, Umar said, he would have made him Khalifah over the Muslims. A Persian slave of no wealth, no lineage, no name of his own, could have led the entire ummah. When the companions looked at Saalim, they no longer saw Saalim the Persian of no standing. They saw Saalim, the man of the Qur'an, who had led them in Makkah and led them in Madinah.

What Saalim's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel a warm admiration for it, to admire how far Islam can lift a person, and then to close the book. That would be a loss, because Saalim's life is not really a

story about social standing at all. It is a question put directly to our own iman.

The world told Saalim, every day of his early life, that he was nothing. He had no lineage to lean on, no wealth to point to, nobody behind him. And he did not spend his life trying to win the approval of the people who looked down on him. He bound himself instead to the one thing that gave him worth in the sight of Allah: the Qur'an. His honour came from his relationship with his Lord, and once it was anchored there, the contempt of others could not touch it. Ask yourself where your own sense of worth is anchored. If it sits in what people think of you, in your title or your background or your wealth, it will rise and fall with their opinion and never hold steady. If it sits in your standing with Allah, no one on earth can take it from you. That is a freedom available to anyone, the slave and the chief alike.

Then there is the way Saalim carried the Qur'an. He did not let it be an ornament. Every time he memorised, every time he recited, he heard it as a command upon his own conduct: I am a carrier of the Qur'an, how can I not do this good, how can I fall into this wrong? Most of us treat our acts of worship as things that earn us status, a memorised surah, a known reputation for piety, a place in a gathering. Saalim treated his worship as a weight that obligated him to be better when no one was watching. So take that into your own ordinary life. Whatever good Allah has given you to carry, a portion of the Qur'an, a prayer, a habit of charity, do not let it sit as decoration. Let it raise the standard of how you behave. Let the believer never be harmed from your direction, in your words, your dealings, your honesty, the way Saalim refused to let the line break at his place.

And notice what filled his heart at the very end. Not fear of death, not a backward glance at all the world had denied him, but the words of his Lord on his tongue and concern for his brother beside him. Beautify the Qur'an with your deeds, he called, and then he proved it with his own blood. This is sincerity, ikhlas, in its purest form: a man doing the deed for Allah alone, at the one moment when there is nothing left to gain from anyone's praise. We will not all be tested on a battlefield. But every one of us is tested in small, unwatched moments, where the only One who sees is Allah, and where we can choose to act for Him or for the eyes of people. Saalim's life asks whether, stripped of every reason to perform for others, your faith would still move your hands toward the good.

So carry one thing from him today. Find the deed you do mainly to be seen, and do one like it in private, for Allah alone. Take whatever you have memorised of His Book, even a little, and let it correct one thing in how you treat people this week. And remember, when the world tells you that you are small, that Allah lifted a nameless slave to lead the best of mankind in prayer, and very nearly to lead them as Khalifah, because of his heart and not his birth. What the world weighs is not what your Lord weighs. May Allah be pleased with Saalim and with Abu Hudhaifa, join them in the gardens of Paradise as they were joined in death, and grant us a measure of the faith that made a man of no name into an Imam of the people of the Qur'an.

This chapter follows the account of Saalim Mawla Abu Hudhaifa (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (3:146).

Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abu Hudhaifa ibn Utbah

The Heir Who Refused His Inheritance

There are men in the story of Islam whom we know only through someone else. We do not know their faces or their voices; we know the husband, or the father, or the freed servant who loved them. Abu Hudhaifa (may Allah be pleased with him) is one of these. He is remembered mostly as the man who raised Salim, and as the son of one of the great chiefs of Quraysh. He himself slips between the lines. And yet, when you stop and look at where he stood and what he was offered and what he walked away from, you find one of the most quietly astonishing decisions in the whole early history of this religion.

He was born to lead Makkah. He chose, instead, to be a soldier in the back rows of a persecuted band of believers. He had every reason the world recognises to refuse Islam, and he refused the world instead.

A name we are not even sure of

Begin with how little we have. We are not certain of his given name. The books offer some derivative of Hashim, but even that is uncertain. His famous kunya, the name by which we call him, is Abu Hudhaifa, the father of Hudhaifa, and he had no son named Hudhaifa. There are theories. Perhaps a son by that name died young, before any of the histories could record him. Perhaps, as happened with others who had no children for a long time, he

was called after a nephew, the way Asma bint Abi Bakr was called Umm Abdullah after her sister's son, on the Prophet's own instruction. The kunya stuck, and the man behind it stayed in shadow. We do not even know for certain what to call him, which is a strange thing to say about a man who could have been the most senior figure in Makkah.

What we do have is his character, drawn in broad strokes rather than incidents. He was tall and handsome, and his manners were impeccable. He was described as kind, gentle, humble, generous. He was known as the best of the children of his father. These are not small things to be remembered by, even when the specific stories are gone. A man can leave behind a reputation for grandeur, or he can leave behind a reputation for gentleness, and his people remembered him for the second.

Born into the inner circle

To understand the weight of his decision, you have to see the family he came from. He was from Banu Abd Shams, one of the most influential and leading clans of Makkah. And he was not merely from it; he was the son of its chief.

His father was Utbah ibn Rabia, one of the great leaders of Quraysh, considered by many the eldest and most senior of them all. When you picture the elites of Makkah, the men of the rank of Abu Jahl and Abu Sufyan, Utbah stood at the head of that circle. His sister was Hind bint Utbah, the wife of Abu Sufyan, the woman who would one day order the mutilation of Hamza (may Allah be pleased with him) at Uhud and would chew on his liver, before she finally accepted Islam at the conquest of Makkah. His foster brother, through nursing, was Musab ibn Umayr. His wife was Sahla bint Suhayl, daughter of Suhayl ibn Amr, who would one day be the chief negotiator of Quraysh at the treaty of

Hudaybiyah. By blood and by marriage, Abu Hudhaifa sat inside the very center of the old order of Makkah, surrounded on every side by its most powerful, and often its most hostile, men.

This is the family he was poised to inherit. With a little time, he could have become the most senior figure of Quraysh. The path was open and clear in front of him.

The night his father came back with a changed face

His father, Utbah, gives us one of the most famous scenes of the early Makkan years, and it tells us a great deal about the world Abu Hudhaifa was raised in. Unlike Abu Jahl, who was always beating the drums of war, Utbah wanted a softer approach with the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. He was not a vicious man toward him. He thought, in the morally bankrupt logic of the Makkan elite, that the Prophet ﷺ must surely have a price.

So he went and sat by the Prophet ﷺ and made his offer. He called him "my nephew," acknowledged his worthy position among them, his truthfulness, his trustworthiness, and then laid out everything Makkah could give. If it was money he wanted, they would gather their wealth and make him the richest man among them. If it was prominence, they would make him their sayyid, their leader, and no decision would be made without him. If it was kingship he sought, they would make him a king, the malik of Makkah, a thing unheard of among their feuding tribes. And if he was possessed by some spirit, they would spend lavishly on doctors until he was cured. The other leaders sat back at a distance and watched, certain that surely this man had a worldly goal.

The Prophet ﷺ listened to all of it. When Utbah finished, the Prophet ﷺ asked him gently whether he was done, whether he

had said everything he wished to say. Then he answered, not with a counter-offer, but with the words of Allah. He began to recite Surah Fussilat, and Utbah, who had come to buy a man, sat and listened to a man who could not be bought. He heard the opening of the surah unfold:

A revelation from the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy; a Scripture whose verses are made distinct as a Quran in Arabic for people who understand, giving good news and warning. Yet most of them turn away and so do not hear.

QUR'AN 41:2-4

The Prophet ﷺ recited on, verse after verse, until he reached the verse of prostration, and then he prostrated. When he rose, he said to Utbah simply: you have heard what you have heard, and now it is up to you to decide. He had thrown the matter back into Utbah's hands, because it was never about money or fame or a crown. It was about a message he would rather be persecuted and die for than trade away for a kingdom.

Utbah walked back to the leaders of Quraysh, and they looked at him and said he had returned with a different face than the one he left with. The Qur'an had changed his face, even though he would not let it change his heart. He told them plainly: this is not poetry, this is not sorcery, this is something divine; take my advice and leave this man alone. And they berated him, and he, being a man of his tribe, fell back into line and continued his opposition.

This was the household Abu Hudhaifa grew up in. A father who came close enough to the truth to feel it change his face, and turned away. A father who would one day, on a battlefield, weep against his own son.

The first to break ranks

Abu Hudhaifa accepted Islam early, with his wife Sahla, among the first to believe. His mother, Fatima bint Safwan, had also accepted Islam early; divorced from Utbah, she emigrated to Abyssinia with her later husband and died there, never reaching Madinah, never seeing the story complete. Abu Hudhaifa entered Islam not at the end, when it was safe and victorious, but at the beginning, when it cost everything.

And here is what makes him remarkable. His peers, the sons of the great chiefs, did not come. Ikrimah the son of Abu Jahl would not accept Islam until the very end. Ikrimah's like, the sons of the outgoing heads of Quraysh, held back for years, bound by their inheritance and their pride. Abu Hudhaifa was the first of that class to break ranks. The man most poised to inherit leadership in Makkah was the first of the aristocracy to walk away from it and stand on the other side.

His father did not beat him as other fathers beat their believing children. Utbah loved this son, the best of his children, and tried to shield him. But the psychological weight of those circles, the pressure of being a believer surrounded by the architects of the persecution, became too much. So Abu Hudhaifa took his wife Sahla and their adopted son Salim and emigrated to Abyssinia, to the land of the Negus.

He became one of the small number of companions who made the migration twice to Abyssinia and then a third time to Madinah, earning the reward of hijra three times over. His son Muhammad ibn Abi Hudhaifa was born in that foreign land. Think of what that means: years later, when Suhayl ibn Amr would stand at Hudaybiyah and refuse to let the words "Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah" be written on the treaty, this man, his own

son-in-law, already had a grandson named Muhammad. The message had reached deeper into Makkah's first families than its leaders could see.

A quiet soldier, and a father's tears at Badr

When he settled in Madinah, Abu Hudhaifa did not become loud. One of the things consistently described about him is how little he spoke. Despite his lineage, despite the royalty in his blood, despite everything he could have claimed, he was known for saying very little. He loved his family. He was so kind to Salim that the boy never once felt himself different from Abu Hudhaifa's own children. And he took up his place as a quiet soldier in the background of the believers, fighting in every battle alongside the Prophet ﷺ.

He was at Badr, and Badr nearly broke him. As the battle opened in the old way, with single combat, three men stepped out from the side of the idolaters. They were his family. His father Utbah, his uncle Shaybah, and his brother al-Walid. Picture what that does to a man, watching his father and uncle and brother walk out to fight and die against the faith he had chosen. It cut him especially deep, because Utbah had been one of the men who tried to talk Quraysh out of fighting at Badr in the first place; he had not wanted family members drawing swords on one another. But when the moment of "honour" came, his tribal loyalty took over, and he stepped onto the front lines.

The three were killed. Hamza was among those who killed Utbah, and from that grudge, Hind would later send Wahshi to murder Hamza at Uhud, so that the threads of that day reached far forward. Abu Hudhaifa broke down and wept. Anyone watching might have thought it was simple grief, a man mourning the loss of his father, his uncle, his brother. The Prophet ﷺ came to

comfort him. And Abu Hudhaifa said something we should not pass over quickly. He swore that it was not doubt, that he had no doubt in the Prophet ﷺ, that he did not regret his decision for a moment. He said only this: he wished his father had entered Islam before that day. He had seen the signs in Utbah, the changed face, the words about something divine, and it pained his heart that his father, whom he loved, had stopped short.

That is the single story we have of him in the battles, and it is enough to know the whole man. He had cut himself off from his own family for the sake of Allah, and he still loved them, and his only complaint was that they had not joined him in the truth.

Breaking tradition for the sake of justice

The other place Abu Hudhaifa appears in the histories is around Salim. Salim was an adopted son, a freed servant whose own parents were unknown. Abu Hudhaifa treated him exactly as he treated his biological children, raised him with love, and would later marry him to one of his own nieces. The boy was, in every way that mattered to that household, a son.

Then the verse came down in Surah al-Ahzab ending the practice of adoption that erased a child's true lineage. Zayd, who had been called Zayd ibn Muhammad, returned to being Zayd ibn Harithah, though it changed nothing of the Prophet's love for him. And Abu Hudhaifa and Sahla were left unsure of themselves. Salim had been raised in their home as a son; now the rules of modesty seemed to fall between them. Sahla came to the Prophet ﷺ in her difficulty, and a concession was given: that Salim be nursed and so counted as her foster son, though that allowance was something usually reserved for those under two years of age. For Salim, the household made an exception so that he could remain within it as a son.

Because Salim's parents were unknown, he could not be renamed after a true father the way Zayd was. He remained simply Salim, the freed servant of Abu Hudhaifa, and the bond between them held. Here was a man of the highest birth in Makkah whose closest companion was a freed slave of unknown parentage, raised as his son and married into his own family. He was willing to bend tradition, gently and within what Allah allowed, for the sake of justice and love. The lineage of Makkah ran in his veins, and he spent it on a boy the old order would not have looked at twice.

What this life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like Abu Hudhaifa's and admire the drama of it, the chief's son who walked away, the father weeping on the battlefield. But admiration is not the point. His life is a set of questions put to our own faith.

He refused an inheritance that the whole world told him to take. Money, leadership, a crown, the position his father held at the head of Quraysh: all of it was within reach, and the cost of keeping it was only to stay quiet about the truth. He let it go. We are rarely offered a kingdom, but we are constantly offered smaller versions of the same bargain: keep your standing, keep the approval of people, keep what is comfortable, and simply do not let your faith inconvenience you. Abu Hudhaifa's life asks whether there is anything we are holding onto that is quietly competing with our submission to Allah, and whether we would have the courage to set it down for His sake alone. That is *ikhlas*, sincerity: to want Allah more than you want the thing the world is offering you to look away from Him.

He loved his family and still chose Allah over them, and then loved them all the more for it. This is one of the hardest balances

in faith. He did not become hard or cold toward his father; on the day Utbah died fighting against Islam, Abu Hudhaifa's grief was real, and his only wish was that his father had been guided. There is no contradiction in this. We can hold to the truth firmly and grieve for those who reject it tenderly. If you have people you love who are far from Allah, his life shows you that faith does not require you to stop loving them. It requires you to want the best thing for them, which is guidance, and to keep your own heart anchored even when theirs is not.

He was a quiet soldier, and Allah did not overlook him. He spoke little. He won no famous duels that the histories preserved. He stood in the back rows and did the work and asked for nothing. The lesson in that is enormous for an ordinary life. You do not need to be seen by people for your deeds to be seen by Allah. The believer who prays in the dark, who gives quietly, who serves without being noticed, who holds firm without announcing it, is not a lesser believer. Abu Hudhaifa reminds us that the One whose attention matters was watching the whole time, and that a life can be hidden from history and still be precious to Allah.

And he longed for one thing above all. What did this man, who could have been a king, actually want? He wanted to be a martyr. He longed for that nearness to Allah, and it was known of him. At the battle of Yamama, against the false prophet Musaylimah, more than five hundred companions were killed, and Abu Hudhaifa was among them. By a strange mercy of Allah, Wahshi, the very man who had killed and mutilated Hamza, fought beside him that day and struck down Musaylimah, saying "one for one." Abu Hudhaifa was granted exactly what he had asked Allah for. Neither of his two sons left children, so he has no lineage surviving him today. His monument is not a bloodline. It is a man

who gave up everything he could have inherited, asked Allah for the highest thing, and received it.

So take something from him into an ordinary week. Notice the comfortable bargain you keep being offered, to soften your faith for the sake of standing or approval, and refuse it once, deliberately, for Allah. Love someone who is far from guidance without compromising your own. Do one good deed this week that no one will ever know you did, the way he stood quiet in the back rows, and let it be for Allah alone. The chief's son who refused his inheritance lived a life that is still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Abu Hudhaifa, grant him the nearness he longed for, and give us the courage to hold our faith above everything the world offers us in exchange for it.

This chapter follows the account of Abu Hudhaifa ibn Utbah (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (41:2-4). Where the histories carry more than one narration, including the uncertainty over his given name and his kunya, the most widely reported has been followed.

Talha ibn Ubaydillah

The Living Martyr

There is a phrase the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ used for only one man in all his Companions. Not "the truthful," not "the generous," though Talha was both. The phrase was stranger and heavier than either: a martyr who still walks. It was spoken on the worst day of the Prophet's life, on the slope of a mountain soaked in blood, over a young man who had taken so many wounds shielding the Messenger of Allah that everyone assumed he was dead, and who somehow, impossibly, was still breathing. To understand how a living man earns the name of a martyr, you have to begin long before that mountain, with a wealthy young merchant who had everything to lose.

His name was Talha ibn Ubaydillah (may Allah be pleased with him), and the world had handed him every advantage it knows how to give.

The young man who had everything

He was born into Banu Taym, a clan of Quraysh, and into comfort. By trade he was a cloth merchant, a successful one, traveling the long caravan routes north to Syria and south to Yemen. The histories describe him with a kind of admiration: tall, dark, with a full head of hair, handsome and youthful, walking at a quick pace, dressed in fine clothes and good scents. Before gold was forbidden to the men of this religion, he wore a gold ring set

with an exquisite ruby. He was perhaps eighteen years old when the Prophet ﷺ began to receive revelation, and by every worldly measure he was exactly the kind of young man with everything to lose by becoming Muslim: protected by his tribe, loved by his people, rich, free, admired.

His tribe is worth pausing on, because it tells you something about the man it produced. Banu Taym was the clan of Abu Bakr as-Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him). Talha was Abu Bakr's second cousin and would become his son-in-law. The same clan had produced Abdullah ibn Jud'an, a man famous before Islam for staggering generosity. Generosity ran in the blood of Banu Taym, and Talha would carry it further than any of them. He was also a man of wide connections, linked through marriage and lineage to the most prominent houses of Makkah. Wealth, standing, good character, and the trust of his people: he had it all, and he was still young enough to enjoy every bit of it.

A monk's question on the road to Syria

When revelation first came, Talha was not even in Makkah. He was out on his trade route, in Syria, the land the Arabs called Sham. And there, in that foreign country, something happened that he could not shake.

He came across a monk, one of the people of the Book, a Christian who worshipped God. The monk called out asking whether anyone in the caravan was from the sanctuary, from the people of Makkah. Talha answered that he had just come from there. The monk asked him a question that made no sense at all: "Has Ahmad appeared yet?" Talha did not even know the name. "Who is Ahmad?" he asked. The monk told him: he is the son of Abdullah, the seal of the prophets, who will come out from the land of the sanctuary and migrate to a place of palm trees, black

soil, and many springs. Then the monk leaned in with an urgency Talha never forgot. "If he has come out, you should hurry and follow him. Hurry and embrace him."

Talha said later that the words landed in his heart, that they penetrated something inside him. He could not explain it. But the moment his caravan returned to Makkah, he began asking what had happened while he was away. The people told him: Muhammad, the son of Abdullah, had claimed prophethood, and he had been followed by Ibn Abi Quhafa, by Abu Bakr.

That was all Talha needed to hear. He did not go to argue. He went straight to his relative, to Abu Bakr, and asked him plainly: "Did you follow this man?" Abu Bakr said yes, and added, "And so should you. He calls to the truth, and he calls to what is good." Talha already knew the Prophet ﷺ, already knew his character, had never once had reason to doubt him. So he went with Abu Bakr to the Messenger of Allah, heard the message of the oneness of God from the Prophet's own mouth, and accepted Islam there, at the side of Abu Bakr as-Siddiq. He was around the eighth person to enter this religion, and he was eighteen years old.

The mother with the whip

We sometimes imagine the rich were spared. They were not. They were punished later and more quietly than the slaves and the poor, behind closed doors rather than in the open square, but the powerful of Banu Taym did not let one of their own walk into Islam without making him bleed for it.

There is a connection here that runs through the whole story. Talha's closest friend was Az-Zubayr ibn al-Awwam, so close that their two lives read almost like one life. And the man who

took charge of punishing both of them was the same brutal figure: Nawfal, a man the Prophet ﷺ called the devil of Quraysh. Nawfal had once bound Abu Bakr and Talha together with a single rope, hand to hand and foot to foot, and had them whipped and beaten while they were tied. For this they earned a grim nickname, the two who were bound together.

But the cruelest hand was not Nawfal's. A man named Mas'ud once described a scene he witnessed while making his way between Safa and Marwah. A crowd was shoving a young man whose hands were tied behind his back, raining blows down on his head as they pushed him forward. And behind him, lashing him with a whip and screaming the ugliest insults, was an old woman. Mas'ud asked who the young man was. They told him: this is Talha, he has left his religion and now follows the man from Banu Hashim. Then he asked who the woman was, the one with the whip. They answered: that is his mother.

His own mother beat him through the streets for believing. Talha had been given everything the world admires, and the moment he chose Allah over it, the world turned its hand against him, beginning with the hand that had raised him.

The reward of a man who was not there

For much of the Makkan period Talha was spared the worst, partly because of his standing, and partly because he was so often away, out on the trade routes, in Sham and Yemen, returning to Makkah only as a home base before leaving again. So it was that he was on the road when the Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr made the migration to Madinah. Talha actually met them as they left, coming the other way from Syria. He gave the Prophet ﷺ fine clothes he had brought back, and told them what he had been hearing of how Madinah awaited him. Then he rode on into

Makkah, gathered the family of Abu Bakr, and personally escorted them on the journey to Madinah before joining the Prophet ﷺ there.

Then came Badr, the first great battle, and Talha missed it.

He did not miss it out of fear or business. He missed it because the Prophet ﷺ himself had sent him, along with Sa'id ibn Zayd, on a mission to scout one of the caravans of Abu Sufyan. The two of them were out on that very errand, watching the roads, when news reached them that the battle of Badr had already been fought and won while they were returning. They had set out to serve the Prophet ﷺ, obeying his exact command, and in obeying it they had been kept from standing beside him on the day of his great victory.

When Talha came to the Prophet ﷺ afterward, he complained, not of his loss, but of what he feared he had missed in the sight of Allah. "Messenger of Allah, I missed Badr." The Prophet ﷺ reassured him that he would still have his share of the spoils, since he had been absent doing what he was commanded to do. But Talha did not care about the spoils. "Messenger of Allah, what about my reward?" The Prophet ﷺ told him: you have the reward of Badr.

The Qur'an speaks of exactly this kind of believer, the one whose heart is fixed even when his body is sent elsewhere:

There are men among the believers who honoured their pledge to God: some of them have fulfilled it by death, and some are still waiting. They have not changed in the least.

QUR'AN 33:23

Talha was one of those who waited, whose intention never wavered, who longed for the moment to defend the Prophet ﷺ and was simply not yet given it. Because his sincerity was complete, his reward was complete. Allah counts the deed of the one whose heart was fully resolved, even when circumstance kept his sword in its sheath. The day would come soon enough when Talha would be given his moment, and he would spend it more completely than almost any man who ever lived.

The day of Talha

That day was Uhud.

Abu Bakr, who was there, used to call it by a single name: he said the whole of Uhud was the day of Talha. It was a day of grief, the day the Muslims were broken on the field, the day the Prophet ﷺ fell, his face struck, his tooth knocked out, his blood flowing, while many fled and only a handful held. And of that handful, none is remembered the way Talha is remembered.

Jabir narrated that whenever the Prophet ﷺ called out on that day, Talha answered. Wherever the Prophet ﷺ directed him, he went, with no hesitation at all, exactly as his friend Az-Zubayr did. The arrows came toward the Messenger of Allah in flights, and Talha put his own body in their path. He caught arrows meant for the Prophet ﷺ with his bare hand. Picture it: the Prophet ﷺ surrounded and attacked from every side, and this one man wheeling around him, sword in one hand, catching arrows with the other, taking wound after wound after wound and refusing to fall.

When the enemy pressed in and the Prophet ﷺ was knocked down, it was Talha who lifted him, carried the Messenger of Allah on his own back, and bore him up the slope of the mountain to

safety, then set him down. Abu Bakr described reaching them afterward. He found Talha laid out, unconscious, bleeding from every part of his body, one wound from a sword, one from a spear, one from an arrow, his foot cut, blood pouring from his mouth. They thought he was dead. And the Prophet ﷺ, breathing hard, having nearly died himself, looked at the ruined body of the man who had shielded him and said that Paradise had become obligatory for Talha that day, that he had fulfilled what he owed.

Then came the phrase that no other Companion received. The Prophet ﷺ said: whoever wants to look at a martyr still walking on the face of the earth, let him look at Talha. A shahid who somehow had not died. A living martyr.

He survived. His daughter said he carried twenty-four wounds from that single day, wounds that never fully healed. His right hand was left partly paralyzed from the arrows he had caught with it. And with that crippled hand and that scarred body, he went on to fight every single battle alongside the Prophet ﷺ for the rest of the Prophet's life. He never once held back the body he had already half-spent for the sake of Allah.

This is why, when the Prophet ﷺ said that Talha and Az-Zubayr would be his two neighbors in Paradise, it makes perfect sense. The man who threw his body between the arrows and the Messenger of Allah, who carried him up the mountain when others fled, has earned the right to be near him forever.

The hand that gave and the hand that forgave

Talha was not only courage. He was, like the men of his clan before him, almost reckless in his generosity, and the Prophet ﷺ gave him more than one beautiful nickname for it. He called him Talha the good, Talha the generous, Talha the one whose giving

flows freely, names that branch out like the limbs of a fruiting tree.

His wealth was enormous. Some narrations say it rivaled the richest of Quraysh, that he could profit a thousand gold coins in a single day. And he gave most of it away. He worried about his money the way a careful believer should worry, afraid it might come between him and his Lord, so he kept it in his hand and never let it into his heart. A companion who used to travel with him and stay in his home swore he had never met a man more generous with his money, his clothes, and his food than Talha. When the call came at Tabuk, Talha gave vast sums in the path of Allah.

He had another habit that the Prophet ﷺ taught carries a person into the shade of Allah's throne on the Day of Judgment: he forgave debts. If someone who owed him fell into hardship and could not repay, Talha would simply cancel the debt, in one narration forgiving as much as thirty thousand dirhams at a stroke. The world had once stripped him of comfort for his faith; now that the world had given his wealth back many times over, he spent it as though it were never really his.

After the Prophet ﷺ passed away, Talha fought in the wars to hold the religion together and in the great conquests, returning to the land of Sham he had once known as a trader, now as a soldier. He was one of the small council of six whom Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) trusted to choose the next leader after him. Talha wanted nothing of the leadership for himself and gave his vote away at once, trusting another to choose well.

The Camel, and a head laid in Ali's lap

The last chapter of Talha's life is among the most painful in this whole history, and it must be told honestly. After the killing of Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him), the Muslims were thrown into confusion. Talha loved Uthman deeply. He had even posted his own son at Uthman's door to defend him, never imagining that anyone would dare to murder the Caliph. When the murder happened and Talha had not been there to stop it, he was crushed by guilt.

He said a line that holds the whole weight of his selflessness. He prayed: O Allah, take from me for the sake of Uthman until You are pleased. Let me suffer, let me be hurt, until justice is done and You are content. He did not ask to be spared; he offered himself up as the price of justice for his murdered brother.

And so Talha, with Az-Zubayr, rode out wanting the killers of Uthman pursued. They met Ali (may Allah be pleased with him), who agreed the killers must be pursued but wanted to steady the situation first so as not to unleash worse chaos. The two sides actually reached agreement and meant to act together. But that night, the very people who had set the whole fitna in motion crept out and attacked both camps in the dark, so that each side believed the other had betrayed the truce. By morning the swords were drawn, and the tragedy of the Battle of the Camel could not be stopped. Talha was killed in it, with as many as seventy-four wounds counted on his body, a body that had spent its whole life taking wounds in the path of Allah.

What happened after the battle may be the truest measure of him. Ali walked the field and came upon Talha's body. He knelt, lifted Talha's head into his own lap, and began to wipe the dust from his face. And he wept. He said: you are too noble and too beloved to me for me to see you like this. He complained to Allah

of his grief and said he wished he had died twenty years before this day rather than live to see such men fall in such a way. Then Ali washed Talha and prayed over him.

After the funeral he called the people forward and sat Talha's son beside him. Some, he said, claimed only the foolish had come out to fight. No, he answered: these were among the most honored faces ever to walk the earth. And then Ali turned to the young man and made a prayer over his fallen father, that Allah would make Talha and himself among those described in His words:

and We shall remove any bitterness from their hearts: [they will be like] brothers, sitting on couches, face to face.

QUR'AN 15:47

There is a quiet sign that came after. A man saw Talha in a dream, three times, asking that his grave be moved because water had reached it. When they opened the grave, they found a stream had begun to soak the ground, and they found Talha's body whole and untouched, the sweet scent of camphor rising from it. They moved him to dry earth, this man whose body had been broken so many times for Allah, now preserved entire.

What Talha's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read Talha's life as a tale of heroism and leave it there, to admire the man who caught arrows with his hand and walk away unchanged. That would be a waste of him. His life is not a monument. It is a set of questions put directly to our own iman.

Start with the road to Syria. A monk asked a question, and the words "landed in his heart," and the moment Talha confirmed that Abu Bakr had believed, he believed too, without bargaining,

without waiting to see how the matter would turn out. He had everything to lose and he lost it gladly. Most of us hold our hearts back until faith looks safe and convenient, until belief costs nothing. Talha's life asks whether you would have moved when the truth first landed in your heart, or whether you would have waited, as so many waited, to see whether it was worth the price. Faith that costs nothing is rarely faith at all.

Then there is Badr, the battle he missed. He was not punished for missing it, because his heart had never left the Prophet's side; he was kept away doing exactly what he was commanded. And Allah gave him the full reward of a battle he never fought. This is one of the most freeing truths in the whole religion. Allah rewards the sincere intention, not merely the visible deed. The mother nursing a sick child through the night and missing the congregation, the worker too ill to fast who longs to fast, the believer who yearns to give and has nothing in his hand, all of these are seen. If your heart is truly resolved toward good for the sake of Allah, the reward is recorded even when life keeps your hands tied. So fix the intention. Want the good thing sincerely, for Him, and trust that He does not overlook a sincere heart.

And there is the way he held his wealth. Talha was rich beyond most of us, and he kept his money in his hand and refused to let it into his heart. He gave most of it away and forgave the debts of those who could not pay, and he worried, even at his richest, that his wealth might cost him his standing with Allah. That worry is itself a mercy. The danger is not in having; it is in being had, in letting what we own quietly take the place that belongs only to Allah. You do not need a thousand gold coins a day to live this. You need to ask, today, what one thing you can give away for His sake alone, expecting nothing back, and what debt or grievance

you can simply forgive and release for Him. Generosity is not a feeling. It is a hand that opens.

Above all there is the living martyr, the body thrown between the arrows and the Messenger of Allah. Most of us will never be asked to bleed for our faith the way Talha bled. But every one of us is asked, daily, to put something of ourselves in front of what we love most: to give our time, our comfort, our pride, our sleep, our reputation, in the path of Allah, and to keep doing it with a hand half-crippled by old wounds, the way Talha fought every battle after Uhud with a hand that would never fully close again. The question is not whether you can be a hero. It is whether you will keep showing up, scarred and tired, and still answer when you are called.

He gave his wealth and asked nothing. He gave his body and survived to give it again. At the end he gave even his life, praying that Allah would take from him until He was pleased. That is the shape of a life poured out for Allah, and not one drop of it was lost; his Lord preserved his very body in the earth and named him a neighbor of His Prophet ﷺ in the Garden. So take one thing from him into your own ordinary day. Move toward the good the moment it lands in your heart, without waiting for it to become safe. Loosen your grip on one thing you are clutching too tightly, and give it for Allah alone. And when you are called to stand for the truth, stand, even wounded, even tired. May Allah be pleased with Talha ibn Ubaydillah, the living martyr, raise us upon a measure of his courage and his giving, and gather us with him and his beloved Prophet ﷺ in the highest companionship.

This chapter follows the account of Talha ibn Ubaydillah (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (33:23, 15:47). Where

the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Asma bint Abi Bakr

The Possessor of Two Belts

There is a kind of courage that announces itself on a battlefield, with a drawn sword and a thousand witnesses. And there is another kind, quieter and far harder, that shows itself when a person stands utterly alone, with no one to protect them, and chooses to do the right thing anyway. Asma bint Abi Bakr had both. She stood before the tyrant of her youth as a frightened pregnant woman with no one at her side, and she refused to speak a word she did not wish to speak. And nearly ninety years later, bent with age, she stood before another tyrant and spoke a word of truth into his face that he could not answer. The same heart did both.

If there is one thread that runs through her whole family, it is this courage. You find it in her father, in her sister, in her husband, and you find it, unbroken, passed down into her son. To meet Asma (may Allah be pleased with her) is to meet the source of a long river of bravery.

A daughter of the truthful

She was the daughter of Abu Bakr as-Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him), the greatest man to walk the earth who was not a prophet. Her mother was Qutaylah bint Abd al-Uzza, whom Abu Bakr divorced after he embraced Islam and she did not. From this marriage came Asma and her full brother, Abdullah ibn Abi

Bakr, the two children who would play the decisive role on the night of the hijrah. Her younger half-sister was Aisha, who would become a Mother of the Believers.

Asma was among the very first to accept Islam, listed by some as the fifteenth person to enter the faith, from that first small batch of believers when the whole community could be counted on a few hands. She accepted it at the hands of her own father. She was still young, and we are told almost nothing of her years in Makkah, for that was the way of the early persecution: the believers were scattered and hidden, and much of their daily life in that city has been lost to us. What we know is that she was a devoted follower from the beginning, a young woman who came to sit and learn from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, as any grown child of Abu Bakr would. She was married in those years to az-Zubayr ibn al-Awwam, himself one of the earliest believers, a man who had embraced Islam through the call of her father.

Two belts for Paradise

When the command came to leave Makkah, the Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr hid in the cave of Thawr while the Quraysh searched the roads. And it fell to Asma to keep them alive. She was tasked with carrying food and water out of the city to the two men in hiding, a heavily pregnant young woman slipping past a city that wanted her father and the Prophet ﷺ dead.

On the night she set out, she had nothing to tie the provisions with. So she took her waist belt and tore it in two, using one half to bind the food and the other half to fasten the waterskin. When the Prophet ﷺ saw what she had done, how she had improvised, how she had carried that food to them at such risk, he smiled and gave her a title she would carry for the rest of her life and into the next: Dhat an-Nitaqayn, the Possessor of Two Belts. And he told

her that Allah had given her, in exchange for these two belts, two belts in Paradise.

It is worth pausing on that, because it is more than an affectionate nickname. The clothing of Paradise is for the people of Paradise. To be promised a garment of al-Jannah is to be told, plainly, that you are among those promised the Garden itself. In a single torn belt and a single smile, the Prophet ﷺ had given her glad tidings that most of mankind will never receive: that her place was secured.

The slap she never forgot

While her brother gathered news in the city, Asma stayed behind to coordinate, and the danger pressed close. Word reached Abu Jahl that she knew where the Prophet ﷺ had gone. This was Abu Jahl at the height of his cruelty, the Pharaoh of this ummah, a man who by then had killed believers of every kind, the powerful and the enslaved alike, and who had architected the very plot to assassinate the Prophet ﷺ.

Sit with this for a moment. The believers had left. She was alone in Makkah, heavily pregnant, with no one to defend her, and there came a knock at her door, and she knew who it was. Abu Jahl stood before her and demanded to know where her father and the Prophet ﷺ had gone. She refused to answer. He asked again, his face red with rage, and again she would not tell him. And he struck her, a huge man striking a pregnant woman, so hard that her earring flew from her ear and she lost it. She never forgot that blow as long as she lived. And still she would not tell him. He turned and left her standing there, alive, having given him nothing.

As she gathered herself afterward, her grandfather Abu Quhafah came to her. He was old and blind and had not yet accepted Islam, and he was troubled, not for the faith, but for her. He said to her, in effect, that this man Muhammad ﷺ had brought her nothing but hardship, that he had deprived her of himself and of his wealth and left her alone in this misery. He wanted her to feel the loss. But Asma, knowing her father had taken what little money there was, did something quietly brilliant. She gathered some pebbles, placed them where her father kept his money, and covered them with a cloth so that her blind grandfather could feel a great heap there. Then she took his hand, set it on the pile, and told him her father had left them plenty. She would not let an old man worry, and she would not let the enemies of faith believe they had broken her household. He has left plenty for us, she said. And what the Prophet ﷺ had given them could never carry a price tag at all.

The poverty that felt like slavery

She made the journey to Madinah heavily pregnant, and in Quba she gave birth to Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr, the first child born to the Muhajirun after the hijrah. The Prophet ﷺ took the newborn, softened a date in his own mouth and touched it to the child's, and made supplication for him. It was the beginning of a bond between Asma and that son that would last until the final hour of both their lives. She would have eight children in all, and among her daughters she named two of them Khadijah and Aisha, after the two most blessed wives of the Prophet ﷺ.

But ease never came to her in this world. From the day she accepted Islam to the day she died, her life was struggle layered upon struggle: tyrants, fear, and grinding poverty. She described it herself with unforgettable honesty. When az-Zubayr married

her, she said, he owned no land, no money, no servant, nothing at all, only a horse and a single camel for drawing water. So she did the work with her own hands. She grazed the horse and gathered its fodder and tended it. She ground the dates for the camel and drew its water and patched its leather bucket. She kneaded the flour, and because she was not good at baking, her sincere neighbors would help her bake the bread. They lived, she said, in absolute poverty.

The Prophet ﷺ had been given a piece of land as an endowment, which he gave to az-Zubayr, who was too occupied as a general in the Prophet's army to have anything of his own. It lay two miles outside Madinah. And Asma used to carry the date stones from that land back to the city on her own head, two miles, on foot. One day, carrying her load, she met the Prophet ﷺ on the road with a group of his companions. He made his camel kneel and invited her to ride. But she felt shy to travel among the men, and she remembered her husband's strong sense of honor and protectiveness, and so she hesitated. The Prophet ﷺ, in his deep understanding of people, read her hesitation at once, said nothing to embarrass her, and simply rode on. When she told az-Zubayr what had happened, he answered her with a tenderness that cuts through all the hardship: your carrying the date stones on your head, he said, is harder for me to bear than your riding with him. It was not jealousy speaking. It was a husband pained that his wife had been seen bent under such a burden.

She lived that life until her father sent her a servant to take charge of the horse, and she said she felt as though he had freed her from slavery. That one word tells you what those years had been.

The Prophet ﷺ spoke to her about her situation in ways that shaped how she would live for the rest of her days. When the verse came down warning that people would be questioned about their blessings, those around the Prophet ﷺ wondered aloud what blessings they could possibly be asked about, when all they had was dates and water. And they were told that yes, they would be asked even about those.

On that Day, you will be asked about your pleasures.

QUR'AN 102:8

She came to him once and said she had nothing of her own except what az-Zubayr brought into the house, and asked whether she could give from it in charity. He told her to give and not to hoard, or her own sustenance would be hoarded against her. Another time he told her, simply and powerfully, not to count what she gave, or Allah would count what He gave to her. Give freely, for the sake of Allah, the way the right hand gives without the left hand knowing. A woman who had so little was being taught to hold even that little with an open hand.

The womb that carried a legacy

Asma was not only a wife and a mother in the household. When the Muslim army faced the Romans at Yarmouk and the believers were terribly outnumbered, she was among the women who took up a sword and fought alongside the men. The courage that had stood before Abu Jahl had not softened; it had only matured.

But consider what her womb carried for this ummah. From her came Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr, the brave martyr, the scholar, and the caliph who would govern from Makkah. And her son Urwah ibn az-Zubayr, who learned the seerah and the hadith at the side

of his aunt Aisha, became one of the great teachers of the next generation. So much of what we know of the Prophet's life, so much of the narration that fills the very biographies we read today, flows down to us through that family, through a son sitting at the feet of his mother and his aunt, gathering the knowledge of the Prophet ﷺ and passing it to everyone who came after. We owe that quiet, hidden labor more than we can measure. Allah records the footprints and the legacies of His servants, even the ones the world never sees.

She herself was a teacher of this ummah. She lived a long life and narrated many hadith from the Prophet ﷺ, and she taught the people the rulings of women's affairs, of hijab and of menstruation, things she was not too shy to ask the Prophet ﷺ about directly. She made hajj many times, with the Prophet ﷺ, with her father, and with her sister, and in her later years, living beside the Kaaba, she would teach the pilgrims the rites of hajj. For that first golden generation, to come to Makkah for pilgrimage was to find this great elder waiting, teaching, her heart making tawaf around the House she lived beside. Her kunyah, the name she went by, was Umm Abdullah, taken after her son Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr.

She also faced the hard question of how to treat the mother who had refused the faith. Qutaylah came to visit her in Madinah while the Prophet ﷺ was alive, and Asma, unsure how to receive a mother who was not a believer, went and asked. The Prophet ﷺ told her to keep good relations with her mother and to show her excellence. This was the very command Allah had revealed: that even a parent who pushes a child toward associating partners with Allah is not to be obeyed in that, yet is still to be honored and kept close in this life.

If they strive to make you associate with Me anything about which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them. Yet keep their company in this life according to what is right, and follow the path of those who turn to Me. You will all return to Me in the end, and I will tell you everything that you have done.

QUR'AN 31:15

A word of truth before a tyrant

The Prophet ﷺ taught that the greatest jihad is a word of truth in the face of a tyrant. Asma spoke it twice, at the two far ends of her long life, and the symmetry of it should stop the heart.

Her son Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr had declared the caliphate in Makkah and held it for over a decade. He restored the Kaaba to the rectangular shape that Ibrahim had built, the shape the Prophet ﷺ himself had once described to Aisha and wished to restore but did not, fearing the people were still too near the days of ignorance, a hadith that Asma's own family had preserved and carried. And then the armies of al-Hajjaj came, and Makkah was attacked, and the Kaaba was attacked, and the believers' hearts were shaken at the sight of it. Abdullah stood his ground beside the House.

Near the end, he came to his mother for counsel, this aging warrior and that mother now around a hundred years old. Should he surrender, he asked, or keep fighting? And she answered him with the steel of a woman who had once stood before Abu Jahl. A dignified strike with the sword, she said, is more beloved than a humiliating lash of the whip. Keep your dignity, my son. We have lived through the Pharaoh of this ummah before. He asked her, would she not grieve for him? She told him she would grieve only if he were killed upon falsehood, but as it was, she praised Allah

who had made him a man she loved and Allah loved. Then she asked him to come close, so she could touch him and take in the scent of him one last time, for they both knew he was going to die.

He told her he feared they would mutilate his body and hang it after they killed him. And she gave him the answer that has echoed down the centuries: the sheep is not harmed by the skinning after it has been slaughtered. Go forward, she said, with clear sight, and seek the help of Allah. As he left, he begged her not to stop making supplication for him. And the last image is of a mother raising her hands to the sky for her son as he walked out to his death. He was killed beside the Kaaba, and al-Hajjaj crucified his body there.

When the people chanted the takbir over his death, an old companion remembered the day Abdullah was born, when the believers had chanted that same takbir in joy over the newborn. The best of people had said it then; the worst of people said it now, over the same man. Asma went out to see the body of her son, and when she was warned against the grief of it, she answered as her family always answered, that these bodies are nothing, the souls are with Allah. She stood before the crucified body and demanded that this noble warrior be brought down and given a dignified end.

Then she went to al-Hajjaj himself, a woman of a hundred years marching in to face the tyrant who had killed her son. He sneered that she had not asked permission. How should I ask your permission, she said, when you have killed my son? He called her son a hypocrite who had violated the sanctuary of Allah and was being made to taste his punishment. And she answered him to his face: you have lied, O enemy of Allah and enemy of the Muslims.

By Allah, the one you killed kept his prayers and his fasts, honored his parents, and was a guardian of this religion. If you have ruined his worldly life, then surely he has ruined your hereafter. And she reminded him of the Prophet's warning of two liars who would arise, and told him that he was the worse of the two. The tyrant who had crushed a city and crucified her son could find nothing to say. He shrank before her, just as Abu Jahl had once turned and walked away from the pregnant woman who would not speak. The same word of truth. The same courage. Almost ninety years apart.

She died not long after, at the age of a hundred, in the midst of her worship, having kept her dignity and her nobility from the first day of her faith to the last.

What Asma's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read a life like this and feel only awe, to place Asma so high above us that she has nothing left to ask of our own small lives. That would be a mistake. Her life is not a portrait to admire from a distance. It is a question pressed directly against our iman.

She trusted Allah's promise more than she feared the people. The most striking thing about her two confrontations is not the bravery itself but where the bravery came from. She was not fearless because she was strong; she was a young pregnant woman alone, and a frail centenarian. She was steady because her heart held something the tyrants could not reach. When you fear Allah more than you fear the loss of your safety, your reputation, or your comfort, then no Abu Jahl and no al-Hajjaj has any real power over you. Most of us shrink from saying the true thing in a far smaller room, before far smaller men. Her life asks

whether our fear of Allah is heavier than our fear of people, because only one of those two can sit at the center of a heart.

She gave with an open hand and did not count it. The Prophet ﷺ told her not to tally her charity, or Allah would tally what He gives to her, and she lived a poverty that makes the lesson cut deeper. She had almost nothing, and still she was taught to give freely, for Allah alone, with the left hand never knowing what the right hand did. That is ikhlas, the sincerity that is the hardest thing of all: to do the deed for Allah and be content that He has seen it, even if no human ever does. Ask how much of what you give, of money or time or kindness, is quietly counted, displayed, remembered. Then ask whether you could give one thing this week the way she gave, in silence, expecting nothing back from anyone but Allah.

She was content with Allah's decree when it took everything. Hunger did not make her bitter. The grinding years that felt like slavery did not turn her against her Lord. And when the decree finally demanded her own son, she did not rage at heaven; she praised the One who had made him a man Allah loved, and she sent him to his death with a supplication on her lips. That is not coldness. It is the deepest trust a believer can reach, that what Allah decrees for those who love Him is never loss, however it looks from the outside. When hardship comes to you, and it will, her life asks whether your trust in Allah can survive the loss of the very thing you thought you could not live without.

And here is the part that should lift the heart. Nothing she suffered for Allah was wasted. The world saw a woman slapped, impoverished, and finally left grieving over a crucified son, a life that the streets of Makkah might have called a tragedy from beginning to end. But she had been promised two belts in

Paradise before she ever left Makkah. Her son was received by his Lord. Her hidden labor seeded the knowledge that still reaches us. What looked like a long defeat was, in the sight of Allah, a long and unbroken victory. This is the promise that should reorder how you spend your days: what you give to Allah, He keeps; what you endure for Him, He sees; and what the world calls loss, He may be writing down as the very thing that saves you.

So carry one thing from her into your ordinary life. Say the true word in the small room when it would be easier to stay silent, for Allah's sake. Give one thing no one will ever know you gave. Meet one hardship without a single complaint against your Lord. That is how the Possessor of Two Belts lived, in courage, in sincerity, in trust, and that path is still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Asma, and with her father, and with az-Zubayr, and with her children, raise us upon a measure of her courage, and gather us among those who held to the truth until the end.

This chapter follows the account of Asma bint Abi Bakr (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (102:8, 31:15). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Al-Zubayr ibn al-Awwam

The Disciple of the Messenger

There is a kind of courage that does not stop to count the cost. It hears the call and it moves, and only afterward, if there is an afterward, does it think about what answering meant. Most of us weigh and hesitate until the moment has passed. Al-Zubayr ibn al-Awwam (may Allah be pleased with him) had this courage from the time he was a boy of thirteen, and he never lost it. When the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ wanted to name the one man in his Ummah who answered the way the disciples of Isa once answered their prophet, he named al-Zubayr. To understand him, you have to begin with the woman who raised him.

The falcon his mother raised

His mother was Safiyyah bint Abd al-Muttalib (may Allah be pleased with her), the aunt of the Prophet ﷺ, a woman of fierce strength who set out to raise her son into something hard and brave. She disciplined him so severely that one of his uncles once told her she was being too rough on the boy. She was not raising a gentle child; she was raising a falcon, and she wanted him to have courage and nobility and honour. He would grow up to be all of that and to exceed every expectation she placed on him.

His father, al-Awwam, was the brother of Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her). So al-Zubayr came to the Prophet ﷺ through

two doors at once: a first cousin through his mother, and a nephew of the Prophet's beloved wife through his father. He grew up an orphan in a society that mistreated orphans, and he carried that wound even before Islam came. When it came, he did not need much convincing; he knew the Prophet ﷺ already. Some scholars place his Islam as early as the fourth or fifth person to believe, alongside Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, who guided him. He was only twelve or thirteen years old.

He was inseparable from Talha ibn Ubaydillah (may Allah be pleased with him), a boy of the same age who embraced Islam in the same days. The two were so bound together that the Prophet ﷺ once named them his neighbours in Paradise, which is not a thing earned lightly.

The boy who would not disbelieve

The cost came quickly. When al-Zubayr became Muslim, he lost nearly every friend except Talha and his cousin Ali, and was ridiculed by the youth of Makkah. And then his own uncle came for him.

This uncle was Nawfal ibn Khuwaylid, the brother of Khadijah, and one of the fiercest enemies the Prophet ﷺ ever faced, nicknamed by him the Shaytan of Quraysh. There is something almost unbearable in it: that the brother of the woman who gave everything for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ would be among those who came at Badr to try to kill him, so much so that the Prophet ﷺ, for love of Khadijah, did not even want to meet him on the battlefield.

This was the man assigned to break al-Zubayr. In those early days, before the open persecution began, the first tactic of Quraysh was to let families torture their own. Nawfal wrapped al-

Zubayr in a rug, shut him in a small room, and lit a fire beside his face so the smoke would suffocate him. He stepped on him and beat him and demanded he renounce his religion. And every night this thirteen-year-old boy would scream, not the scream of someone breaking, but of someone refusing to. He shouted, "I will never disbelieve. I will never disbelieve." The neighbours walked past and heard him, and what they heard was not surrender but resistance. The smoke filled his lungs until he passed out, and still the words coming out of him were that he would never turn his back on his faith. The falcon his mother wanted him to be, he already was, and more.

You would think that kind of nightly torture would make a boy keep his head down. It did the opposite. He never missed the gatherings in the house of al-Arqam, where the Prophet ﷺ taught and the Qur'an came down; he went from his uncle's fire straight back to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He, Talha, and Ali became a trio, three young men knit together by age and closeness.

And then came the moment that named him forever. A rumour reached al-Zubayr that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ had been attacked. He came running, sword already drawn, and arrived panting before the Prophet ﷺ, who asked, "What is wrong with you? Do you have news?" Al-Zubayr said he had heard the Prophet ﷺ was attacked. The Prophet ﷺ smiled and asked, "And what would you have done?" The boy answered that he would have struck whoever had touched him. In the earliest, most dangerous days of Islam, when drawing a sword in the Prophet's defence would almost certainly have meant his own death, he had not stopped to think at all. For this he earned the title of the first man to draw his sword in defence of the Prophet ﷺ.

The swimmer in the Nile

As his uncle's torture grew worse, the Prophet ﷺ gave him permission to migrate to Abyssinia with his cousin Ja'far (may Allah be pleased with him). Most who made that journey went as couples; al-Zubayr was not yet married, and he went alone among them. There he drew close to the Negus, the just king who sheltered the Muslims, a man he would later grieve and pray over in his absence from Madinah.

The most vivid moment of those years came during an attempted coup against the Negus. A faction rebelled, and the two armies faced each other across the Nile. The Muslims had to stay out of it, but their safety hung on the outcome. They waited on the riverbank, desperate for news. Al-Zubayr was the youngest, the fittest, and the only one who could swim. So they fashioned a sort of skin for him, and he slipped into the Nile, crossed to where the battle was raging, watched, and swam back. As he came across the water toward the waiting believers, he lifted his voice: "Allahu Akbar." The Negus had won. Umm Salama, who told this story, said they all began to make takbir, and that she swore by Allah they had never been so relieved. It is the whole man in one image: he goes into the water while everyone else waits on the shore.

A thousand men on the battlefield

If you had seen al-Zubayr, you would have seen a very tall man, lean and muscular, with only a light beard, so tall that on his horse his feet would nearly brush the ground. He was one of only two men, the other being Khalid ibn al-Walid, who could control a horse with his legs alone while wielding a sword in each hand. Umar would later say one al-Zubayr was worth a thousand men. His legacy is almost entirely written on the battlefield.

When he came back from Abyssinia, he married Asma bint Abi Bakr (may Allah be pleased with her). Abu Bakr wanted his daughters married to men struggling in the path of Allah, and he knew the life he was giving her: that of a man always out in front. She made the migration to Madinah while heavily pregnant, into a city where the enemies of the Muslims were spreading a rumour that the believing women had been bewitched so none could bear a living child, and where the first months brought only miscarriages. Then Asma and al-Zubayr had a son, Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr, the first child born to the migrants in Madinah. The Prophet ﷺ softened a date in his own mouth and placed it in the child's, made supplication for him, and they carried the baby through the streets crying "Allahu Akbar." Even a child born alive was, in those days, a victory. And al-Zubayr named his children with intention: where his friend Talha named his sons after prophets, al-Zubayr named his after warriors and martyrs. You can read a man's hopes in the names he chooses.

Then come the days that made him. Every battle al-Zubayr fought belonged to him, but none like Badr. The veterans of Badr hold a rank in this religion that no later deed can reach; the Prophet ﷺ said they were forgiven for all that came before and after. When Jibril asked how he regarded them, the Prophet ﷺ said they were the best among the Muslims, and Jibril said the angels who fought at Badr were the best of the angels.

At Badr the Muslims were caught unready, outnumbered and out-armoured, with only two horses among them against a hundred on the other side. The two who rode those horses were al-Miqdad and al-Zubayr. That day al-Zubayr wore a yellow turban. He drove into the enemy ranks, running between their horsemen with both swords drawn, and took two grievous wounds that did not slow him. And here is the honour the Prophet ﷺ told them of

afterward: when Allah sent the angels down at Badr, Jibril and the angels came wearing the yellow turban of al-Zubayr. The angels of heaven dressed themselves like him; no one else can make such a claim. His son Urwa would say that as a child he used to put his fingers into the wounds in his father's body, holes so deep they were like openings in his flesh: two from Badr, one from Yarmuk.

The disciple

At Uhud, the disadvantage was greater still, the enemy larger. The Prophet ﷺ called out, "Who will take my sword?" Each time he asked, al-Zubayr answered at once, until the Prophet ﷺ gave the sword to Abu Dujana instead. Al-Zubayr admitted he was hurt, until he saw Abu Dujana fight, and then he understood. But notice what he had done: he had answered, every time, the instant the call came, without a thought for the cost.

That day a giant of Quraysh, Talha ibn Abi Talha, rode out on the finest horse in the enemy's ranks and called for someone to face him. Only one man answered, on foot: al-Zubayr. His mother Safiyyah came to the Prophet ﷺ and said, "O Messenger of Allah, he will kill my son." The Prophet ﷺ said, "Rather, al-Zubayr will kill him, if Allah wills." Ali described al-Zubayr that day as a man with the fury of a tiger and the spring of a lion. He struck the giant's sword down, pulled him off his horse, took his blade, and killed him with it, then rode that finest horse back to the Muslim lines.

Al-Zubayr was among the few who did not flee from the Prophet ﷺ at Uhud when the line broke and it seemed all was lost. He put his body between the Prophet ﷺ and death and took wound after wound. Later Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) asked al-Zubayr's son Urwa, "Do you know which verse was revealed

about your father and your grandfather, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq?" It was about those who, after the catastrophe of Uhud, still answered the call and stayed:

Those who responded to God and the Messenger after suffering defeat, who do good and remain conscious of God, will have a great reward.

QUR'AN 3:172

Then came the trench, al-Khandaq. The Prophet ﷺ learned that tribes were plotting against the Muslims from within their fortress, and asked, "Who will go and bring me their news?" To slip in among people bent on killing the Prophet ﷺ was nearly suicidal. Three times he asked, and all three times the only one to answer was al-Zubayr. And the Prophet ﷺ said the words that would define him: "Every prophet has a disciple, and my disciple is al-Zubayr."

It is easy to read past that as one more virtue in a long list. Sit with it. The Prophet ﷺ likened al-Zubayr to the Hawariyun, the disciples of Isa. And what are they praised for in the Qur'an? Their answer. Isa asks who will help him in the cause of Allah, and they reply:

When Jesus realized they [still] did not believe, he said, 'Who will help me in God's cause?' The disciples said, 'We will be God's helpers; we believe in God- witness our devotion to Him.'

QUR'AN 3:52

The distinguishing mark of the disciples was the speed of their yes. That is exactly what the Prophet ﷺ had watched al-Zubayr do since he was a boy running with a drawn sword toward a

rumour. When al-Zubayr returned safely from the fortress, the Prophet ﷺ said to him what he had said to only one other man, Sa'd: "May my father and mother be sacrificed for you." For a word like that from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, all of it was worth it.

He fought on. At Yarmuk, against the Byzantines, he charged alone through the entire Roman army to the rear, turned, and cut his way back to the front, felling everyone in his path both ways. He was a leading general in the conquest of Egypt. When Umar died, al-Zubayr was one of the ten given the glad tidings of Paradise and one of the council of six who chose the next caliph, and his vote went to his cousin Ali.

His debts, and his murder in prayer

His death is bound together with his sons' in something the histories treat as a sign.

When Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him) was besieged, al-Zubayr sent his sons to guard him and wanted to fight the besiegers himself, but Uthman forbade any blood spilled in his cause and ordered him to stand down. Al-Zubayr practised that restraint, hating every moment of it. Then Uthman was murdered. In the chaos that followed, al-Zubayr and Aisha and Talha went out demanding justice for the killers, and met Ali before the battle of the Camel.

This is the tragedy. Al-Zubayr and Ali had grown up together, embraced Islam together, loved one another. Ali reminded him of a day long ago when the Prophet ﷺ found the two of them sitting as brothers and asked, "Do you love Ali?" Al-Zubayr said of course he did. And the Prophet ﷺ told him that one day he would fight against Ali, and would be in the wrong. Al-Zubayr had

forgotten it. When Ali brought it back to him, he broke down in tears, gave Ali his pledge, and walked off the battlefield.

A man named Amr ibn Jurmuz followed him as he left, asking to keep his company, and al-Zubayr, thinking him another man walking away from the fighting, allowed it. But the man knew he could never overpower al-Zubayr in a fair fight, so he waited. When the time for prayer came and al-Zubayr said "Allahu Akbar" and stood defenceless before his Lord, the man stabbed him to death and took his sword. He carried it to Ali, expecting to be rewarded. Instead Ali wept, for he had heard the Prophet ﷺ say, "Give the murderer of the son of Safiyyah the news of the Fire." Ali began to repeat it, and the killer heard, fled, and took his own life. Al-Zubayr went to Paradise among the ten; his murderer went to the Fire by the tongue of the Prophet ﷺ.

Al-Zubayr used to pray that he would die in his prayer. He was killed in his prayer. So, in the histories Dr. Omar Suleiman relates, were his sons after him, this death standing before Allah becoming a pattern in his family. There is something almost luminous in it, for a person is raised on the Day of Resurrection in the state he died.

There is one last thing, and it is the most surprising. On the morning of his death, al-Zubayr told his son Abdullah that he sensed he would be killed that day, and that his one great worry was his debts. This man, so close to the Prophet ﷺ, was in debt because he kept no wealth in his house; whatever came to him, he loaned or gave away by nightfall. He told his son to sell whatever was needed to pay every creditor, and if he fell short, to seek the help of his Master, meaning Allah. For years afterward, whenever the burden overwhelmed him, Abdullah would call out, "O Lord of al-Zubayr, settle his debt." It turned out that far more

was owed to al-Zubayr than he had ever owed; his estate, once reckoned, was worth a fortune in the millions, wealth he never once tasted in this life, because he had given it away as fast as it came.

He left only about five or six narrations from the Prophet ﷺ, astonishing for a man so close to him, with a wife like Asma and sons like Abdullah and Urwa to carry his words. When his son asked why, al-Zubayr said he had heard the Prophet ﷺ say, "Whoever lies about me, let him take his seat in the Fire," and he was too afraid of misrepresenting him to speak. The same fearlessness that drove him alone into armies made him tremble at a single misquoted word.

What al-Zubayr's life asks of our faith

It is tempting to read a life like this and feel only awe, to file al-Zubayr away as a warrior we could never resemble. That would be a waste. He is not a statue but a question put to your own iman, and the question is simple: when the call comes, how long do you take to say yes?

The thread running through every scene of his life is the speed of his obedience. The boy running with a sword. The single man slipping into the Nile. The young man answering at Uhud and al-Khandaq before anyone else could open his mouth. This is what made him the disciple, and the Qur'an tells us plainly what the disciples were praised for: not their strength, but their answer. "We will be God's helpers." You and I are not asked to charge through a Byzantine army, but we are asked, every single day, to answer Allah, and most of us answer slowly, or only once it is convenient, or not at all. The prayer can wait until the show ends; the charity until the money is comfortable; the repentance until we are older. Al-Zubayr's life asks you to collapse that delay, to

make your yes to Allah quick, before you talk yourself out of it, the next time the adhan calls or a good deed presents itself and the lazy part of you reaches for later.

His sincerity is the second thing. His wealth never spent a night in his house. He gave it away so completely that he died in debt, and yet was secretly a millionaire in the sight of Allah, rich with what he had sent ahead. The giving was so quiet that even his own debts hid how much he owned. That is ikhlas, doing the deed for Allah and being content that He alone has seen it. Ask what you could let go of this week for His sake, without a single person knowing you did it.

And consider how he died. He prayed for years to die in his prayer, and Allah granted it in the cruellest of circumstances, struck down defenceless the moment he turned to his Lord. From the outside it looked like a noble man betrayed in a needless war. In truth he was lifted, in the exact posture he had begged for, into the company of the ten promised Paradise. What the world saw as a wasted death, Allah recorded as an answered prayer. This is the promise that should steady you when your own life does not go the way you planned: what you ask of Allah, He hears, and may answer in a form you would never have chosen and would not trade for anything once you see it whole.

There is a mercy hidden even in the war that killed him. Ali, who stood on the other side of that battlefield, later recited about Uthman and Talha and al-Zubayr and himself the verse of those whose hearts Allah purifies:

and We shall remove any bitterness from their hearts: [they will be like] brothers, sitting on couches, face to face.

QUR'AN 15:47

The fitna set these brothers against each other in this world; Allah promised to seat them facing one another in the next, with every bitterness lifted away. If that is the ending Allah prepares for those who loved Him and erred in the chaos of trial, then hold your hope in Him higher than your fear, and guard your own heart from bitterness toward the believers, for the One who removes it in Paradise is teaching you to remove it now.

So take one thing from al-Zubayr into your day. The next time Allah calls you to something, by the adhan, by a need in front of you, by a sin you know you should leave, answer the way the disciples answered, quickly, before the moment cools. Give one thing for His sake that stays hidden. And ask Him for the death you want, trusting that He hears. May Allah be pleased with al-Zubayr ibn al-Awwam, the disciple of His Messenger ﷺ, raise us in the state we would most wish to meet Him in, and gather us among those seated as brothers, face to face, with no bitterness between them.

This chapter follows the account of al-Zubayr ibn al-Awwam (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (3:52, 3:172, 15:47).

Safiyyah bint Abdul-Muttalib

The Warrior Aunt

There is a kind of strength that does not announce itself in peacetime. It waits, quietly, inside an ordinary life, and only shows its full size when everything is at stake. Safiyyah bint Abdul-Muttalib (may Allah be pleased with her) carried that kind of strength. She was the aunt of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the sister of Hamza, the mother of one of the ten promised Paradise. And in the two darkest battles of the early ummah, when grown men froze or fled, it was this woman, near sixty years old, who picked up a weapon and stood her ground.

To understand her, and to understand the son she raised, you have to begin long before any of that, in a house in Makkah crowded with uncles and aunts, where a girl was born in the same year as the Prophet ﷺ himself.

One aunt among many

The Prophet ﷺ had a large family. Ask most people to name his uncles and they will reach for the four famous ones, Hamza and al-Abbas and Abu Talib and Abu Lahab, and stop there. But Abdul-Muttalib had many sons, ten or eleven or twelve by the count of the scholars, and six daughters. These were the uncles and aunts of the Prophet ﷺ, seventeen in all. Most of them passed away before Islam ever came, before a single word of

revelation descended on the man among them who would change the world.

Of all those uncles and aunts, only a few are known with certainty to have accepted Islam. Among the uncles, Hamza and al-Abbas. Among the aunts, with no doubt at all, one name: Safiyyah bint Abdul-Muttalib. The scholars mention that Atikah and Arwa may have believed as well, but the aunt whose faith is certain, and whose life then stepped forward into the very center of the story, is Safiyyah.

Part of the reason is simply her age. She was born around the year 569 or 570, only a year before the Prophet ﷺ, and some say in the very same year. She was the youngest of Abdul-Muttalib's daughters, and she grew up alongside her nephew so closely that she was less like an aunt to him and more like a sister. She was also bound, heart and soul, to her brother Hamza, who was born within a year of her. The two of them were inseparable. Her whole life would orbit around him as much as it orbited around her own children.

Her ties to the Prophet ﷺ ran through marriage as well as blood. Her first husband, al-Harith ibn Harb, was the elder brother of Abu Sufyan. When he died, she married al-Awwam, who was the brother of Khadijah. So Safiyyah was, at once, the aunt of the Prophet ﷺ, the sister-in-law of his beloved wife Khadijah, and a woman woven into Makkah at every level. With al-Awwam she had three sons: az-Zubayr, al-Sa'ib, and a small boy named Abd al-Ka'bah who died very young.

Then al-Awwam died too, and Safiyyah was left a widow with two young boys to raise alone. She never married again. She made a decision that would shape everything that came after: she would raise az-Zubayr and his brother by herself.

A mother who made a falcon

Safiyyah knew exactly what awaited an orphan in that society. Boys without fathers were overlooked, pushed aside, treated as less. The Qur'an's later insistence on honoring the orphan, and the Prophet's own tenderness toward orphans, came precisely because of how cruelly they were so often treated. The Prophet ﷺ knew that pain from the inside; his own father died before he was born and his mother when he was six. Safiyyah understood the danger, and she refused to let her son be diminished by it.

So she raised him hard. She was a fiercely involved mother, a single woman who poured everything she had into one boy. She took him out to learn the arts of war while he was still a child. She called on his uncle, Nawfal ibn Khuwaylid, another of Khadijah's brothers, to take him out and give him the exposure any young man of that society needed, so that az-Zubayr would grow up strong, intelligent, courageous, able to stand on his own and never be bullied for being fatherless.

She was also a poet, and her poetry survives. When Nawfal once told her that she disciplined the boy as though she hated him, the words stung her, and she answered him in verse. Whoever claims that I hate my own child has lied, she said. I am hard on him so that one day he will grow strong and clever, so that he can fend for himself, so that one day he will defeat armies single-handed and return victorious with the spoils. In another line she asked, almost daring the world: did you find my son to be soft fruit, or did you find him a falcon? She was not raising a child to be coddled. She was forging one.

She never dreamed what that strength would one day be turned toward. For when az-Zubayr was only thirteen years old, he came home and told his mother that he had accepted Islam. He had

followed the religion of Muhammad ﷺ against all his uncles, against the entire house of Abdul-Muttalib, against everything in his society. The boy she had built to stand alone now stood, alone, for the truth. The very courage she had instilled in him so that other children would not push him around was the courage that let him hold his ground when belief itself made him an outcast.

At first she argued with him. We are not told much of the exchange, but it is not hard to imagine. You are already an orphan, already without a father or an older brother to shield you, and now you will join this religion of the persecuted and bring even more harm upon yourself? She fought him on it, and when she could not move him, she turned to Nawfal again, the same uncle, and asked him to do whatever it took to make the boy give up his faith. Nawfal had a brutal way of torturing az-Zubayr.

It is important to see clearly what was happening here, because it is gentle and terrible at once. Safiyyah did not do this out of hatred for her nephew, the Prophet ﷺ, whom she loved like a brother. She did it out of love for her son, a love that had become, for a time, a misguided thing trying to drag him back from danger. The Qur'an speaks to exactly this kind of love, the parent who pleads out of sincere care and is wrong to:

If they strive to make you associate with Me anything about which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them. Yet keep their company in this life according to what is right, and follow the path of those who turn to Me. You will all return to Me in the end, and I will tell you everything that you have done.

QUR'AN 31:15

Allah honored the sincerity of such parents and still commanded the child not to obey them in disobedience to Him. Safiyyah was, for a season, on the wrong side of that verse, not out of malice but out of fear for her boy.

The day Hamza believed

Then came the day that changed her too.

Safiyyah's life, as we have said, revolved around Hamza. She used to wash his clothes, greet him when he returned from a journey, comb the lice from his hair, watch over him like an older sister though she treated him more like a son. Hamza was a legend in Makkah. The youth wanted to be like him, and when he came home Safiyyah was the first to meet him.

When Hamza accepted Islam, it was a turning point for the whole community. He stood before Abu Jahl and struck him and declared that he was on the religion of his nephew, and that single act gave the believers a strength they had not had before, the beginning of their ability to stand and declare their faith openly. And on that same day, the day her beloved brother became Muslim, Safiyyah herself embraced Islam. She came to the Prophet ﷺ and gave herself to him and his message.

She became a deeply righteous woman. She still did not remarry. She continued to raise az-Zubayr. And when the command came to the Prophet ﷺ to warn those nearest to him, she was among the names he called:

Warn your nearest kinsfolk

QUR'AN 26:214

When that verse descended, the Prophet ﷺ stood and called out to his closest relatives by name. He called to his daughter Fatimah, and he called to his aunt Safiyyah, and he told them: ask me whatever you wish of my wealth, I will give it to you, but I cannot protect you from Allah on the Day of Judgment. You know how much I love you, yet I can do nothing for you before Allah. That she was named, alongside Fatimah, tells you how close she stood to his heart.

Then, in time, she made the hijrah to Madinah, and the quiet strength her whole life had been storing began, at last, to show its full size.

The strength behind the door

Safiyyah was no ordinary woman, and she did not leave her courage to her son alone. She herself would walk with a dagger or a sword, ready to defend the Prophet ﷺ. Twice that readiness became something the histories never forgot.

The first was at Uhud, on one of the hardest days the Muslims ever knew. Hamza was killed there, the leader of the martyrs, struck down by the spear of Wahshi, and afterward his body was mutilated. When the news of how many had fallen reached Madinah, the women came running toward the battlefield to find their dead. And the Prophet ﷺ, who loved Hamza so dearly, thought of his sister. He called az-Zubayr and said: go to your mother, stop her, do not let Safiyyah come and see the body of Hamza. He could not bear for her to see what had been done to her brother.

But Safiyyah was already moving toward the field, a weapon in her hand, in one narration a spear she was hurling toward the enemy, and she was shouting at the men who had fled,

condemning them: did you flee from the Messenger of Allah? How could you leave his side? Az-Zubayr ran to her and told her to stop. She pushed past him. He caught her arm and begged her, again and again, to turn back, and again and again she refused and pressed forward toward the center of the battle. Finally he said the only thing that could reach her: the Messenger of Allah commands you to stop. Not your nephew Muhammad, but the Messenger of Allah orders it.

And the moment she heard that it was a command from the Messenger of Allah, look at the faith of this woman, she stopped. She froze. She said: I hear and I obey. Then she told her son why she had come. She had heard that Hamza was killed, and if it was true, she said, then I will be patient and I will seek the reward; let me only see him. When az-Zubayr confirmed that Hamza was gone, she wept, and she began to seek Allah's forgiveness for him, and at last she was allowed to come to his body.

She stood over him deep into the night. And what did she say, this woman who had loved her brother more than almost anyone alive? She kept repeating the words of the believer struck by calamity:

those who say, when afflicted with a calamity, 'We belong to God and to Him we shall return.'

QUR'AN 2:156

To Allah we belong and to Him we return, she said over him, again and again. O Allah, forgive him. O Allah, forgive him. And then, looking up to the sky: O Allah, I seek his reward from You; I seek the reward of this pain with You. She had even brought the shroud that would wrap his body. Here was a heart torn open by loss, and yet it said every right thing. As fiercely as she loved

Hamza, she grieved him the way Allah loves grief to be borne: with patience, with forgiveness sought for the dead, with the reward asked of Allah alone.

The second time her strength showed was at the Battle of the Trench. The believers were starving and exhausted, surrounded by the largest army they had ever faced, betrayed from within by those who had broken their covenant. The women, the children, and the elderly were gathered together for safety, and with them was Hassan ibn Thabit, the poet, who fought with his tongue and not with his hands. Two men from the treacherous tribe came scouting, with others behind them, looking to see whether any fighting men guarded that group, whether they were armed.

Safiyyah, by now near sixty, told Hassan to go out and confront the man who came to check on them. Hassan froze. He said he could not; if he could fight he would be on the battlefield, not here. He did not know what to do. So Safiyyah took a pole, and she hid behind the door, and she waited. When the man slipped in, she struck him with the pole and killed him, single-handed. Then she took his body and threw it down over the wall, where they were positioned on a height. When the others outside saw their dead companion thrown over, they assumed an army was inside, and they fled. There was only Safiyyah. By her courage alone, one woman guarded that entire fortress and turned away the scouts of an enemy host.

When the Prophet ﷺ heard of it, it made perfect sense to him. Safiyyah was not like anyone else. She was her own ummah, her own army, her own strength. This was the woman who had produced az-Zubayr, and from then on the Prophet ﷺ would call him by her name, Ibn Safiyyah, the son of Safiyyah, because the boy had inherited the strength and the courage of his mother.

A sun wrapped in darkness

Safiyyah lived on with az-Zubayr and his wife Asma, the daughter of Abu Bakr, who came to regard Safiyyah as a mother of her own. She had given everything: her youth to a widowhood she never undid, her fierce love to a son she raised into a hero, her body to the defense of the faith on two battlefields, her patience to the grave of the brother she adored.

And she outlived the Prophet ﷺ. When he passed away, she composed poetry to eulogize him, and one image from it stays in the heart. She described him as a sun wrapped up in darkness and yet, somehow, still shining. It is the truest thing that can be said of him: a light that the darkness of the world could not put out, a guidance that went on glowing through every loss. She had watched that sun rise in her own household when they were children together. She lived to mourn its setting and to name what it had been.

She remained in Madinah for the rest of her days, and when she died she was buried in al-Baqi, the resting place of so many of the beloved. The one aunt of the Prophet ﷺ whose faith is certain. The mother of the falcon. The woman who, when men fled, stood.

What Safiyyah's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read Safiyyah's story as the tale of a remarkable fighter and leave it there, to admire the woman with the pole behind the door and feel that her life has nothing to do with ours. That would be to miss what her life is actually asking.

She had her courage, and yet the strongest moment in her whole story is not when she killed a man or hurled a spear. It is the moment she stopped. She was charging toward the body of her

own brother, beyond the reach of her son's pleading, and the instant she heard that the Messenger of Allah had commanded her to halt, every ounce of that ferocity went still. I hear and I obey. That is the heart of faith. Not the strength to push forward when we want to, but the strength to submit the moment we know what Allah and His Messenger ﷺ have asked. Most of us are strong about the things we already want to do. Her life asks whether we are strong enough to obey when obedience cuts against our own grief, our own will, the thing we are running toward with all our heart.

Then look at how she grieved. She loved Hamza more than almost anyone alive, and when she lost him in the worst possible way she did not turn bitter, did not accuse, did not ask why Allah had let it happen. She stood over him through the night saying we belong to Allah and to Him we return, seeking forgiveness for him, asking Allah for the reward of her own pain. That is contentment with the decree of Allah, not as a cold acceptance but as something a breaking heart can still choose. Loss will come to every one of us. Her life asks whether, when it comes, our first words will be complaint, or whether they will be the words of the believer: to Allah we belong, and to Him we return.

And see what she did with the strength she had. She did not keep it for herself. When grown men froze, she stepped into the gap, with a weapon she barely knew how to swing, near the end of her life, because the faith and the Prophet ﷺ needed defending and no one else would. Whatever Allah has given you, your courage, your skill, your voice, your wealth, the question her life puts to you is the same: will you spend it for Allah when the moment comes and others hold back, or will you wait for someone more qualified to step forward in your place?

So take one thing from her into an ordinary week. The next time you know what is right and every part of you is pulled the other way, say in your heart what she said: I hear and I obey, and then do it. The next time loss or disappointment lands on you, reach first for to Allah we belong and to Him we return, before you reach for blame. And when you see a gap that someone should fill for the sake of Allah, a wrong no one is correcting, a good no one is doing, do not wait to be the most qualified. Be the one behind the door who stands. That is how this aunt of the Prophet ﷺ lived, in obedience, in patient surrender, in courage spent for Allah, and it is a way still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Safiyyah bint Abdul-Muttalib, raise us upon a measure of her faith, and make us, when the moment asks it, among those who hear and obey.

This chapter follows the account of Safiyyah bint Abdul-Muttalib (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (31:15, 26:214, 2:156). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Umm Habiba bint Abi Sufyan

Royalty Redefined

There is a kind of strength that nobody applauds, because nobody sees it. It is the strength of a woman who keeps her faith year after year in a foreign land, with no family beside her, no community to lean on, a small daughter to raise alone, and every worldly reason to walk away. Umm Habiba bint Abi Sufyan (may Allah be pleased with her) had every door left open behind her, and she walked through none of them. She stayed. And because she stayed, Allah honoured her with a place that He grants to almost no one.

To understand the second half of her life, you have to first measure what she had already survived.

A faith tested again and again

She had become Muslim in Makkah, the daughter of Abu Sufyan, the most powerful man in the city and soon the fiercest enemy of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. She faced what a young woman in that house would face for leaving the religion of her father. Then, when the believers were called to migrate to Abyssinia, she could have stayed. She could have told her husband, Ubaydullah ibn Jahsh, to go ahead while she remained safely in Makkah under the protection of Abu Sufyan's name. She did not. She left her city and her standing and crossed the sea into exile for the sake of her faith.

In that distant land her husband abandoned Islam. He turned to Christianity and then died in his apostasy, and she remained a Muslim, alone now, a widow with an infant daughter in a country that was not hers. Back in Makkah her father had become the chief antagonist of the very religion she was clinging to. Year after year passed, thirteen years in all away from her home, and she only grew firmer.

When Dr. Omar Suleiman pauses over her story, this is what he asks the listener to feel before anything else: the sheer weight of her istiqamah, her steadfastness. Most people lose their faith over one trial. She was handed many. Persecution from her family, the danger of migration, the betrayal and death of her husband, the long ache of exile, and a father leading the war against everything she believed. At every turn there was a reason to let go, and she let go of none of it. There is a reason, he reminds us, that Allah chose to honour this particular woman with what He honoured her with. It was not arbitrary. It was the reward of a faith that had been tested in fire and did not break.

The long wait, and the homecoming

She had already been married to the Prophet ﷺ while still in Abyssinia, the contract written, the dowry arranged in her absence by the Negus himself. But the marriage and the man were separated by an ocean and by six long years. The contract was complete, yet she would not stand before her husband for years. In that time her daughter Habiba grew up before her eyes, and the two of them lived quietly in that community of exiles, sustained by the bonds they had built there.

At last the time came. Seven years after the migration to Madinah, after the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah had made the roads safe, Jafar ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) led a

delegation of the people of the two migrations home, sixteen families making their way at last to the Prophet ﷺ. They arrived near the turn of the months of Safar and Rabi al-Awwal. For all of them it was joy. For Umm Habiba it was something deeper. She had been gone from her land and her people for thirteen years. She had lost her livelihood, lost her husband, borne and raised a child in exile, and now she came home not only as a believer but as a wife of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

In Madinah she was reunited with her old friend Umm Salama (may Allah be pleased with her), whose life ran so strangely parallel to her own. Both women had left Makkah for Abyssinia with their husbands. Both had borne children there. Both were widowed, each in her own way, and both, by very different roads, came at last to the household of the Prophet ﷺ. They would sit together and reminisce about the years in Abyssinia, describing that distant land to their husband. There is a narration carried by Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) in which Umm Habiba and Umm Salama tell the Prophet ﷺ about a church they had seen there, filled with images and built over the graves of the righteous. He warned them that those who build places of worship over graves and adorn them with such images would be among the worst of people before Allah on the Day of Resurrection. It is a small thing to notice, and a beautiful one, that the three women in that single account, Aisha, then Umm Salama, then Umm Habiba, are the three greatest narrators of hadith among the wives of the Prophet ﷺ.

A request that revealed who she was

When Umm Salama had first married the Prophet ﷺ, she had been honest about her own heart. She told him she was a jealous woman, unaccustomed to a household shared with others, even

though such marriages were ordinary in her world. Umm Habiba's response to the same situation was the opposite, and it is preserved in an authentic narration that tells you a great deal about her.

She said to the Prophet ﷺ, would you also marry my sister, Azza. He was surprised by the request, and asked her whether she truly wished him to marry her sister as well. She answered, I am not your only wife, and I would love for the one who shares this good fortune with me to be my own sister. There is no jealousy in those words at all. There is only a heart so at peace with its blessing that it wants to widen the circle and bring the people it loves inside it.

The Prophet ﷺ told her gently that this was not lawful for him. To be married to two sisters at once is forbidden in Islam, and even the latitude Allah had granted His Messenger in marriage did not extend to that. She tried once more, suggesting that perhaps he might marry Durrah, the daughter of Umm Salama. He explained that this too was impossible: Durrah was his stepdaughter, and beyond that, her father Abu Salama had been his own milk-brother, both of them nursed by Thuwaybah, so the bond of kinship through nursing made it unlawful regardless. Then he said to her simply, so do not offer me your daughters and your sisters.

Dr. Omar Suleiman lingers here on something easy to miss. If the Prophet ﷺ had been an opportunist, a man bending the rules to his own desire, this was exactly the moment to bend them. A willing wife was offering him her sister and her stepdaughter. He refused both, on principle, because the law was the law and it bound him. He had married late, in his fifties, in a society where that was unusual, and apart from Aisha he had married women

who had been married before, each marriage carrying a visible wisdom: hearts softened, tribes reconciled, the wounded gathered in. The fact that he would not loosen a single ruling even when it was offered to him is, in its own quiet way, a proof of his prophethood. He acted on revelation, not on appetite.

The father at the closing door

Then the politics of the peninsula came to her doorstep in the form of her own father.

The Makkans broke the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah. By then the Muslims had grown strong in the years of peace, because Islam thrives when the call can move forward unhindered, and the violation had put Makkah in real danger. Abu Sufyan panicked. He travelled to Madinah to try to patch the treaty back together. He went first to the Prophet ﷺ, who rose and walked away from him. He went to Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), who turned from him. He went to Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), who was, as the narration almost jokes, fortunate not to have struck him, and who ignored him and walked off. He even tried Fatima (may Allah be pleased with her), knowing she was a path to her father's heart, the same Fatima who had watched this man stand on the sidelines as her father was tormented in Makkah. That door closed too.

So he came at last to Umm Habiba, his own daughter, whom he had not seen in years. He entered her home and found that her home was the home of the Prophet ﷺ. She was sitting on the bed, and the bed of the Prophet ﷺ was nothing more than a simple palm-fibre mattress that left marks on his back, with a single blanket, folded by day into a seat and unrolled by night for sleep. As her father moved to sit beside her on it, she rose quickly, folded the mattress away, and sat on the bare floor.

He was stung by it. He asked her, am I too good for this bed, or is the bed too good for me. And she answered him plainly: this is the bed of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and you are an idolater, an impure man, and I did not want you to sit upon it. She would not let her own father rest where the Prophet ﷺ rested. It was at her doorstep that Abu Sufyan felt every door in Madinah finally shut in his face.

Mercy at the conquest, and a daughter's prayer

What happened next is one of the great lessons of the whole story. The Prophet ﷺ marched on Makkah, and when he took the city that had driven him out and broken so many of his people, he did not crush it. He gave a general amnesty to the population that had fought him for two decades. On the advice of al-Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him), who reminded him that Abu Sufyan was a proud man, he even granted Abu Sufyan an honour, declaring that whoever entered the house of Abu Sufyan was safe. This was not the ego of a conqueror. It was the mission. He had come to break the idols and what they stood for, not to break the people.

And in that hour Abu Sufyan accepted Islam, and so did Umm Habiba's brother Muawiyah, and her brother Yazid. It is narrated that the two longest prostrations Umm Habiba ever made were on the day her father embraced Islam and the day her brother Muawiyah did. For all that had passed between them, she had never stopped loving her family or longing for them to be guided. That longing is one of the most human things in her story. The believer does not stop wanting salvation for the people of their own blood, even the ones who caused them pain.

There is a narration in which the Prophet ﷺ entered upon her and found her making a particular supplication. She was asking

Allah to let her enjoy the company of her husband the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and of her father Abu Sufyan, and of her brother Muawiyah, a prayer for a long life alongside the people she loved. The Prophet ﷺ told her that she had asked Allah about lifespans already set, and days already counted, and provisions already apportioned. Allah will not bring anything forward before its time, nor delay anything past it. And then he turned her heart higher: had you asked Allah to protect you from the punishment of the Fire and the punishment of the grave, that would have been better for you. He was teaching her, and us through her, to spend our most earnest prayers on the things that last forever, not the days that are already written.

The companions did not find it easy to sit with Abu Sufyan at first. Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with both of them) reports that they would not look at him with respect, would not keep his company. These were people he and his class had tortured, fought, and bereaved. The Prophet ﷺ never disgraced the newcomers, but he also never raised them above the believers on whose backs the religion had been built. He did not put Abu Sufyan atop the Kaaba to call the adhan. He put Bilal (may Allah be pleased with him) there. He honoured the proud man who had just submitted, and he honoured still more the formerly enslaved man who had borne the heat of persecution for his faith. He held both in their rightful place, because aid and victory come, as he taught, through the way a community treats its most vulnerable.

A life that refused power, and a death that sought peace

Umm Habiba lived to watch the dynasty of her own family rise, her brother Muawiyah ascending to power before her eyes. And she wanted none of it. She turned away from politics and away from privilege. When the Umayyad authority was flourishing and

she could have claimed any rank she wished, she claimed nothing. She kept clear of the fitan, the civil strife of her age, and gave her life to worship, to teaching, and to the careful transmission of what she had witnessed of the Prophet ﷺ. She rose to be the third of the wives of the Prophet ﷺ in the number of hadith she narrated, sixty-five in all, ten in Sahih al-Bukhari and eight in Sahih Muslim, carried onward by her brothers, by her daughter Habiba, by Zaynab bint Umm Salama, by Urwah ibn al-Zubayr.

Her detachment from worldly power did not spare her cruelty. When the rebels who would become the forerunners of the Khawarij laid siege to Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him) and cut off even his water, Umm Habiba rode out on a mule with water hidden beneath her garment, trying to use her standing as a wife of the Prophet ﷺ to relieve the man who had bought the city's wells and expanded its mosque. The crowd parted for her. But a young man stepped forward and demanded to know what she was doing. He lifted her garment, seized the water, and poured it out on the ground. Then he cut the reins of her mule, so that the animal bolted and threw the Mother of the Believers to the ground before everyone. People who recited the Qur'an and quoted its verses had so hardened their hearts that they could humiliate the wife of the Prophet ﷺ in the open street. It was that very outrage that pushed her, in the order of the wives, to leave for Makkah.

Her death, by contrast, was gentle and full of light. Aisha narrates it. As Umm Habiba lay dying, she called for Aisha and said to her, there used to pass between us the kinds of things that pass between co-wives, the small frictions that were only natural. May Allah forgive me and you for all of it. Aisha answered that may Allah forgive her for all of those things and release her from any

account for them. Umm Habiba smiled and said, you have made me happy, may Allah make you happy. Then she sent for Umm Salama and said the same to her, and received the same. The three greatest women scholars of this religion, the three Mothers of the Believers who had carried so much of the Prophet's words to the ummah, parting from this world by clearing every account between them and seeking nothing into the grave but the forgiveness of Allah.

What Umm Habiba's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read her life and feel only awe, to place her so high above us that she asks nothing of our days. That would be a loss. Her life is not a portrait to admire from a distance. It is a question pressed directly against our own iman.

She stayed when every exit was open. That is the first thing to take. Most of us are not asked to migrate across a sea or to lose a husband to apostasy or to watch our own father lead the war against our faith. We are asked smaller versions of the same question every day: to hold to the prayer when it would be easier to skip it, to keep our honesty when a lie would be more convenient, to remain on the path of Allah when the people around us drift off it and invite us along. Steadfastness, istiqamah, is rarely dramatic. It is mostly the quiet refusal to walk through the door marked easier. She refused that door for thirteen years. Ask yourself which door you are being tempted toward right now, and resolve, for the sake of Allah, not to take it.

She was content with what Allah gave her, so content that she wanted to share it. When she asked the Prophet ﷺ to marry her sister, she showed a heart free of the gnawing envy that poisons so much of our lives. We measure our blessings against other people's and find ours wanting. She looked at her blessing and

wanted only to widen it. That contentment, rida, with the decree of Allah is one of the surest signs that the heart has settled on Him rather than on the world. And He corrected her even there, when she prayed for long life with the people she loved, redirecting her to pray instead for safety from the Fire. Let that reorder your own supplications. The things you beg Allah for most desperately, the longer life, the more comfort, the days with those you love, are already written and will not move by a single hour. Spend your most urgent prayers on what will still matter when those days are gone.

She refused privilege when it was hers for the taking. As her family rose to rule, she stepped back into worship and teaching and obscurity. There is a lesson in that for anyone who has ever been near power, money, or status and felt it pulling at the heart. She knew that nearness to Allah is worth more than nearness to a throne, and she chose accordingly, year after year, with no one forcing her hand. And notice how Allah let her serve the religion anyway, not through politics, but through the patient transmission of the Prophet's words. The hadith she carried still shapes how this ummah prays. She is the narrator of the promise that whoever prays twelve units of voluntary prayer in a day and a night, Allah will build for them a house in Paradise. And the chain that carried it is not a chain of words alone. Umm Habiba said she never abandoned those twelve units from the day she heard them from the Prophet ﷺ. The one who heard it from her said he never abandoned them either, and so did the next, and the next. Each one did not merely repeat the reward; each one lived it.

So here is the concrete thing her life lays at your feet, today, for the sake of Allah. Pray those twelve sunnah units, the two before Fajr, the four before and two after Dhuhr, the two after Maghrib and the two after Isha, and do not abandon them. Pray them the

way she did, not as information passed along, but as a habit kept faithfully until death, building stone by stone a house in Paradise that no rebel can throw to the ground and no dynasty can take away. That is royalty redefined: not the palace her family seized, but the house her Lord was building for her in private, while she asked the world for nothing at all. May Allah be pleased with Umm Habiba, raise us upon a share of her steadfastness and her contentment, and gather us with the Mothers of the Believers in the house He has promised.

This chapter follows the account of Umm Habiba (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). It quotes no Qur'anic verse directly, as the lecture cites the Sunnah rather than a specific ayah; references to the Qur'an are kept in prose. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Umm Habiba

The Daughter Who Believed Alone

There is a kind of loneliness that the early Muslims knew, and it did not always come from torture or hunger. Sometimes it came from the dinner table. It came from a father who was a chief, a household that worshipped what you had abandoned, a name that opened every door in the city and now opened none of them to you. Among the women who carried this weight was Ramla, the daughter of Abu Sufyan, who would one day be known to the whole ummah by another name. She believed before her father believed, before her tribe believed, when believing meant she was, in the truest sense, alone in her own family. And from that loneliness Allah brought her, by a road no one could have charted, into the household of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself.

To understand what her faith cost, and what it won, you have to know whose daughter she was.

A daughter of the rival house

She was born around the year 595 or 596, some fourteen or fifteen years before the Prophet ﷺ received revelation, which made her about twenty-five years younger than him. Of her childhood we know almost nothing. What we know in abundance is her lineage, because her lineage is half the story.

She belonged to Banu Umayya, the great rival clan of Quraysh, the house that stood against Banu Hashim, the Prophet's own. Banu Hashim, Banu Makhzum, and Banu Umayya were the three most powerful clans in Makkah, forever competing over wealth, over the honor of feeding pilgrims, over rank and reputation. When the Prophet ﷺ declared that he was a messenger of Allah, the objection of clans like Banu Umayya was often not really about creed at all. It was about power. To acknowledge a prophet from Banu Hashim was to acknowledge that the highest honor of all had landed in a rival's tent, and that they could not bear.

Her mother was Safiyya bint Abi al-As, the paternal aunt of Uthman ibn Affan (may Allah be pleased with him), which made Umm Habiba and Uthman first cousins. Most accounts say Safiyya died before Islam, so she was never there to oppose her daughter or to embrace the faith alongside her. Ramla was, by most reports, the only child of Abu Sufyan and Safiyya, though her father married many women and she had many half-brothers and half-sisters.

And her father was Abu Sufyan. His given name was Sakhr ibn Harb, a fitting name for the early years: Sakhr means rock, and Harb means war. He was powerful, noble, eloquent, and rich, a diplomat whom the foreign emissaries to Makkah liked and trusted, one of the more literate men of the city, well versed in poetry. That literacy mattered, because it meant Abu Sufyan could recognize something in the Prophet ﷺ that cruder men missed. There are narrations of him slipping out to listen to the Qur'an being recited, almost drawn in. But his tribalism held him back, and his power held him back. He was among the elite who opposed the Prophet ﷺ, though in the earliest days he was not the loudest of them; that role belonged to men like Abu Jahl. Only later, after most of those men were killed at Badr, did Abu Sufyan

become the chief antagonist of the Muslims, the last great elder of the opposition, pulling the strings until the conquest of Makkah.

This was Ramla's family. Her father's wife, Hind, was the one who would later pay Wahshi to kill Hamza (may Allah be pleased with him) at Uhud and mutilate his body. Consider, against that backdrop, the unlikeliness of what this daughter chose to do. To become Muslim in such a house was not a quiet adjustment. It was a rupture.

The husband and the hidden faith

Ramla was married to a man of real distinction: Ubaydullah ibn Jahsh, brother of Zaynab bint Jahsh (may Allah be pleased with her), and of Abdullah and Hamna as well. All four of these siblings accepted Islam, and all four were the children of the Prophet's own paternal aunt, Umayma. So they were already woven into the family of the Prophet ﷺ before revelation came.

Ubaydullah carried another distinction too. He had been one of the four famous Hanifs, the handful of men in Makkah who, before the Prophet ﷺ was sent, had looked at the idols of their people and walked away from them, searching for the pure monotheism of Ibrahim. Like Waraqa ibn Nawfal, Ubaydullah had turned toward Christianity in that search. So when the Prophet ﷺ announced his prophethood, Ubaydullah was quick to recognize the truth he had been seeking, and he accepted it. So did his wife. They are counted among the first fifteen or sixteen people to embrace Islam.

We have no narration of the moment they converted, and that silence itself tells us something. Many of the earliest conversions were done quietly, out of fear of family and tribe, and for the

daughter of Abu Sufyan that fear was not abstract. When Abu Sufyan eventually learned that his own child was among the followers of the man he opposed, it wounded and embarrassed him. Here was one of the staunchest enemies of the Prophet ﷺ, who had to face the chiefs of Quraysh, and his own daughter had joined the other side. Some historians suggest this is part of why Abu Sufyan was never quite as brutal toward the Muslims as the other chiefs were. He had a soft spot for his daughter, and her presence among the believers stayed his hand even as he opposed the message. Yet she and her husband still felt the weight of persecution, the same pressure that pressed on every early Muslim, and eventually it became too much to bear.

So they left. They joined the second migration to Abyssinia, the larger of the two crossings to the land the Arabs called Habasha, the realm of the Negus, modern-day Ethiopia. At that point they had no children yet, and she was still simply Ramla. She made that journey while pregnant. On foreign soil, in a Christian kingdom across the sea from everything she had known, she gave birth to a daughter named Habiba, and from that child she took the name she would carry for the rest of her life and into every book of hadith: Umm Habiba, the mother of Habiba. You will not find her in the chains of narration as Ramla. You will find her as Umm Habiba (may Allah be pleased with her).

The dream of a disfigured face

What happened next in Abyssinia is told only of her, and it is a strange and sorrowful turn.

The books of seerah report that Umm Habiba saw a dream. In it she saw her husband, Ubaydullah, with a disfigured face. She woke shaken, for a face ruined in a dream is not a thing that brings comfort. And soon she understood it. Ubaydullah, the man

who had left the idols, embraced Christianity, then embraced the Prophet ﷺ to perfect his monotheism, the man who had crossed the sea fleeing persecution for his faith, had given that faith up. He returned to the Christianity of the people around him. The narrations dwell on one particular detail: wine. He had begun to long for it, to drink it, and the reports say he drank until he died in Abyssinia.

It is worth pausing here, as Dr. Omar Suleiman himself pauses, because this is no small claim. Most details in the seerah are added color, and the scholars do not scrutinize their chains the way they scrutinize the chains of hadith, because seerah is where we draw lessons, not where we derive law. A weak chain in a story does not make it false; it simply means it does not reach us with the certainty of the Prophet's own words. But this report is not a small detail. It claims that a companion abandoned his faith and died upon it, and a claim that heavy deserves caution. None of the chains that affirm his apostasy and death in that state are authenticated. There is even a narration in Abu Dawud in which Umm Habiba says only that they had barely reached Abyssinia and met the Negus before her husband passed away. So we know he died there. We do not affirm with certainty that he died having left the faith. We say, as the scholars say, Allahu a'lam, Allah knows best.

And even the popular narration, taken at its worst, does not describe a sincere turning away from the truth. It describes something sadder and more ordinary: a man who, after surviving persecution and crossing an ocean for his belief, grew complacent in the safety of a new country and slipped back into an old appetite that swallowed him. Whatever the precise truth, the lesson the scholars draw from it is sound. Guard your faith. Do not assume that having held it once means you will hold it

always. The hardest test is sometimes not the persecution at the beginning, but the comfort that comes after.

Stranded, and a second dream

Whatever became of Ubaydullah, the situation it left Umm Habiba in was brutally clear. She was alone in a foreign land, a young mother raising a small daughter, with no relative to shelter her.

She could not go home. To return to Makkah as a Muslim, holding her baby girl, was to walk straight back into pressure far worse than what she had fled, for now she had no husband to stand beside her, and her father was Abu Sufyan, chief of the opposition. She could not stay easily either. By now many of the Muslims of Abyssinia had moved on to Madinah; she had missed that window. She was part of a community living in exile, protected by the Negus but with no clear road forward, no husband, no family, and no timeline. She was, in every practical sense, stuck.

And in that stuck place, she had another dream. In this one, a caller addressed her by a title: Ummul Mu'minin, the mother of the believers. She woke in astonishment. Only one group of women in all the world carried that title, and those were the wives of the Prophet ﷺ. She was a widow stranded in Abyssinia with a small child, the daughter of Abu Sufyan, with no connection to the Prophet ﷺ at all. The dream made no earthly sense. But it pleased her, and she held onto it as something good. And she says that no sooner had she received it than a knock came at her door, and the next chapter of her life began to open.

The wedding the groom never attended

The Prophet ﷺ had heard of Umm Habiba's hardship, a believing widow stranded across the sea with a child and no protector. So he sent a letter to the Negus, Ashama, carried by Amr ibn Umayya. The letter asked the Negus to propose marriage to Umm Habiba on the Prophet's behalf, and, if she agreed, to act as the Prophet's representative, his wakil, in the marriage contract itself.

Pause on that choice. The Prophet ﷺ had beloved companions still in Abyssinia, his own cousin Ja'far among them, any of whom could have represented him. Instead he chose the Negus, a king who had never met him, to stand in his place in so intimate an affair. The Negus had once told Ja'far that were he not bound by his rule, he would go to the Prophet ﷺ and carry his sandals for him. Here, now, was a way to serve the one he loved without ever having seen his face. Imagine his honor at being asked.

The Negus sent a servant girl named Abraha, not the famous Abraha of the Year of the Elephant, but a young woman of his household, to knock on Umm Habiba's door and convey the proposal. Umm Habiba tells the story herself. When she opened the door and heard the news, she was so overcome that she took off all the jewelry she was wearing and gave it to the girl, and Abraha cried out the takbir for joy. Her impossible dream had come true. How she would ever reach Madinah, how the marriage would even take place across that distance, none of it mattered in that moment. The Prophet ﷺ had proposed.

Then the Negus gathered the Muslims of Abyssinia for the ceremony in his palace. He dismissed his guards, an extraordinary gesture, and brought the believers in: Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, Khalid ibn Sa'id, Abdullah ibn Hudhafa al-Sahmi, and others, noble companions all. Umm Habiba's guardian for the

contract was Khalid ibn Sa'id (may Allah be pleased with him), her closest relative present. The Negus rose and addressed the gathering. He bore witness that Allah is One and that Muhammad ﷺ is His servant and messenger, the one whom Jesus had foretold. Then he announced that the Messenger of Allah had written asking him to marry him to Umm Habiba, daughter of Abu Sufyan, that he had answered the call, and that he had set the dowry at four hundred gold dinars, paid from his own wealth. Khalid ibn Sa'id rose, praised Allah, sent salawat upon the Prophet ﷺ, and gave Umm Habiba in marriage. The contract was complete.

Four hundred gold dinars, paid by the king himself, was the largest dowry any of the wives of the Prophet ﷺ ever received. As the gathering rose to leave, the Negus stopped them. Sit, he said; it is the way of the prophets that when a marriage is concluded, food is served. And he brought out a feast in his honor. So the wedding of the Messenger of Allah was celebrated in a palace, with the largest dowry he ever gave, at a banquet thrown by a king, and the groom himself was a sea away and never present. For a community living quietly in exile, it was a night they would not forget.

Abraha's only request

In the days that followed, the Negus sent Abraha back to Umm Habiba with gifts: jewelry, perfumes, fine goods, everything a woman might want. He was not finished honoring the Prophet ﷺ. And through these visits, Umm Habiba and the servant girl became close. One day Umm Habiba asked her what she wanted for herself. Abraha had a single request. She said: if you ever find yourself in the presence of the Prophet ﷺ, and you remember

me, give him my salaam, because I will probably never meet him myself.

It would be six years before Umm Habiba reached the Prophet ﷺ. Six years from that wedding in the palace until she finally stood before her own husband in Madinah, seven years after the Hijra. And when at last she met him and told him everything, how the Negus had represented him, how the marriage had been conducted, all of it, she told him too about Abraha, that she had become Muslim and had asked, again and again, that her salaam be carried to him. The Prophet ﷺ was glad, and he answered: and upon her be peace, and the mercy of Allah, and His blessings.

There is something in this small exchange that opens onto something vast. Here was a simple servant girl, thousands of miles from Madinah, who would in all likelihood never lay eyes on the Prophet ﷺ, and the one thing she wanted more than gold was that her greeting reach him. Like the Negus, who loved a man he had never met, she loved him across an impossible distance, and asked only to be remembered to him. And what she could manage only through years of waiting and a friend's memory, we have been given freely. When we say, Allahuṃma sallī wa sallim ala Nabīyyina Muḥammad, Allah has appointed an angel to carry that salaam to the Prophet ﷺ, and he returns it. Abraha needed Umm Habiba to be her messenger across six years and a sea. We have a messenger of light, every single time, and he responds to each one of us.

A noble steed, and a softened heart

When the news of the marriage reached Abu Sufyan in Makkah, the reaction was not what one might expect from the chief of the opposition. He was not angry. He was pleased, and he said of the

Prophet ﷺ, "He is a noble steed that cannot be rejected." Whatever else stood between them, Abu Sufyan could recognize honor when it touched his own house, and the wisdom of this marriage reached far beyond his daughter. It was part of what turned that hard heart, in time, toward Islam. Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) connected the marriage itself to a verse of the Qur'an, a verse about the strange softening that Allah can work between people set against each other:

God may still bring about affection between you and your present enemies- God is all powerful, God is most forgiving and merciful-

QUR'AN 60:7

Umm Habiba migrated from Abyssinia to Madinah seven years after the Hijra, in the company of Ja'far and those returning with him. She had been married to the Prophet ﷺ for six years already, yet she would have only three years at his side before he passed away, peace and blessings upon him.

What Umm Habiba's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a story like this and be carried only by its wonder: the impossible dream, the king who stood in for the groom, the servant girl's salaam crossing the sea. But the wonder is not the point. The point is the iman that held its ground long enough for Allah to act, and that is something her life asks of us directly.

Begin with where she stood. Umm Habiba believed alone. Her mother was gone, her father was the chief of the opposition, her clan was the rival house of the Prophet ﷺ himself. To say "I believe" in that household was to lose her place at the center of

her own family and gain, in this world, almost nothing. Many of us know a smaller version of that loneliness: the relative who rolls their eyes at the prayer, the household where faith is tolerated rather than shared, the sense that to take Allah seriously is to step a little apart from the people we love. Her life says that this loneliness is survivable, that it has been survived, and that the One you step toward is enough. She did not need her father's approval to be right with Allah. Neither do you.

Then there is the matter of her husband, and the warning folded inside it. Even in its gentlest reading, the story of Ubaydullah is sober: a man who held the truth, suffered for it, crossed an ocean for it, and then let comfort and an old appetite carry it away. The hardest test of faith is not always the one at the beginning, in the heat of persecution. Sometimes it is the slow one that comes after, when the danger has passed and the new life is easy and the heart, no longer braced against anything, simply drifts. This is the test most of us are actually living. Ask whether your own faith is firmer in hardship than in ease, and if the honest answer troubles you, take it as a mercy that you noticed. Steadfastness, *thabat*, is something to ask Allah for every day, precisely because no one is guaranteed to keep what they once held.

And then there is her trust, which is the heart of it. Look at how long she waited. Six years stranded after that wedding, with no husband present and no road home, holding a dream she had no way to fulfill. She did not engineer her rescue; she could not. She simply remained firm where Allah had placed her and held onto a good sign, and Allah moved a king across the sea to honor her, softened a hard father's heart, and in His own time brought her to the side of the best of creation. This is what trust in Allah's promise looks like when stripped of every guarantee: to stay faithful in the stuck place, in the long wait, when nothing is

moving and you cannot see the road, because you know the One who can. Most of us want the road revealed before we will take a single step. She took the step, and waited, and the road came.

So carry one thing from her into your ordinary life. If your faith has cost you closeness with the people around you, do not let that cost shake you; the One you turned toward is worth it. If your life right now is comfortable, examine your faith for drift and renew it before it weakens. And if you are stranded in some long wait of your own, a thing you long for that Allah has not yet given, hold steady and trust His timing, the way a stranded widow in Abyssinia once held onto a dream that made no sense, until the day it came true. May Allah be pleased with Umm Habiba, who believed alone and was not abandoned, and may He grant us her steadfastness, her patience in the wait, and a trust in His promise that does not need to see the road before it walks.

This chapter follows the account of Umm Habiba (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (60:7). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed, and the report of Ubaydullah's death is presented with the caution the lecture itself urges.

Umm Salama

The Mother Who Taught a Nation

There is a kind of greatness that announces itself in battle, and a kind that lives in a small room beside a mosque and changes the course of a religion with a single sentence. Umm Salama (may Allah be pleased with her) carried the second kind. The histories do not record many dramatic episodes from her years as a wife of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. What they record instead is something rarer: hundreds of her words, hundreds of moments she watched closely and remembered exactly, and a handful of occasions when the whole community was stuck, and she was the one who knew what to do.

She had already lived a life of migration, loss, and patience by the time she entered his household. This is the story of what she did with the years that followed, and of how much of what we know about the Prophet ﷺ reaches us only because she lived, watched, and taught.

Into the household

When she married the Prophet ﷺ, he reassured her with words that would shape everything to come: your family is my family, your children are my children. Then she moved, with her children, into one of the hujurat, the small chambers built against the wall of the mosque in Madinah where the wives of the Prophet ﷺ lived. The room she entered was not empty of memory. It had

belonged to Zaynab bint Khuzayma (may Allah be pleased with her), called Umm al-Masakin, the mother of the poor, the only wife of the Prophet ﷺ to die in Madinah during his lifetime. He had buried only two wives in all his years: Khadijah in Makkah, and now Zaynab. Into that room of remembrance Umm Salama came to live fully as a wife of the Messenger ﷺ, and to raise her children in his shadow.

She occupied a place from the very beginning that would never be taken from her. She was the eldest of his wives at the time, and when the Prophet ﷺ would visit his wives, he visited her first. She accompanied him on many of his journeys and became, in some of the most delicate moments of those expeditions, an advisor he trusted.

To meet her was to meet a presence. Beyond a beauty that was noted, she was elegant, intelligent, knowledgeable, inquisitive, and unafraid to speak. She carried herself with such bearing that she occupied the place of a scholar in any gathering she entered. They said of her that she always said the perfect thing for the moment. When she described something, she described it exactly. When she asked, her question was the clearest in the room. When she gave a verdict, it was the most concise and direct. She had a beauty to her speech and a mastery of Arabic so complete that she never had to repeat herself. All of the mothers of the believers are our mothers, but she truly held the place of a teacher of the ummah.

The treaty that no one would obey

Her greatest contribution to the life of the Prophet ﷺ came at a place called Hudaybiyyah, on a road that should have ended in Makkah.

To understand the weight of that day, you have to feel what the companions were feeling. The Muhajirun had been driven from Makkah, persecuted, hunted, separated from the city of the Kaaba for years. Now they had set out to perform Umrah, hearts already turned toward the tawaf they had dreamed of through every hardship. And they were stopped, short of the city, at Hdaybiyyah. There the Prophet ﷺ agreed to a treaty, because revelation showed him that the good hidden inside it was greater than anything they would gain by pressing forward. Then he told them what their hearts could not bear to hear: end your Ihram here, sacrifice your animals, shave your heads, and turn back to Madinah.

No one moved.

He gave the command, and they did not obey, not out of rebellion, but out of grief and hope. These were the same companions Allah declared Himself pleased with when they gave their pledge under the tree, the Bay'at al-Ridwan, and Umm Salama was present for it. They were not defying their Prophet ﷺ. They were clinging to the possibility that something might still change, that Allah might yet open the road to Makkah this year. So they stood frozen. He repeated the order. Still nothing. Some of them could not let go of the dream of the Kaaba long enough to put a blade to their own hair.

The Prophet ﷺ went into the tent of Umm Salama and told her what was happening, and asked her what to do. Her answer was the kind of counsel that seems small until you sit with it. Do not say another word to them, she said. Go out, and without speaking, slaughter your own sacrifice. Then call for the barber and have your head shaved. Then you will see what they do. If they see you do it, with the finality of an action they cannot

mistake, they will follow you, because there is nothing they follow more than your example.

He went out. He spoke to no one. He sacrificed his animal, called for the barber, and had his head shaved. And the companions, seeing it, rose at last and began to slaughter their sacrifices and shave one another's heads. The narrations say some of them were in such distress that they cut each other in the process. But the deadlock had broken, and it broke because a woman in a small tent understood people, understood her Prophet ﷺ, and understood that in that crushing moment the answer was not more words but a single, silent act. It is no wonder he trusted her with the most sensitive situations of his life.

The questions that brought down revelation

Umm Salama did not only give counsel. She asked. And some of her questions were answered not by the Prophet ﷺ alone but by Allah, in verses that the ummah has recited ever since.

She once asked him, from a heart full of faith and not a trace of rebellion, why it seemed that the Qur'an addressed the men and not the women, as though the revelation spoke past her and the women around her. She was a woman of taqwa; she was not challenging the Qur'an, she was reaching toward it. She said that some time passed, and then she heard the Prophet ﷺ addressing the people from the pulpit. She hurried, tied up her hair, and went to her door to listen, and she heard him recite what Allah had sent down in answer to her:

For men and women who are devoted to God- believing men and women, obedient men and women, truthful men and women, steadfast men and women, humble men and women, charitable men and women, fasting men and

women, chaste men and women, men and women who remember God often- God has prepared forgiveness and a rich reward.

QUR'AN 33:35

A verse that places the believing men and the believing women side by side, equal in reward and equal in standing before Allah, came down because Umm Salama asked what so many women of her time must have carried silently in their hearts. Her question settled a principle for all time: when the Qur'an addresses the believers in the masculine, it speaks to the men and the women together in duty and in reward, unless something specifies otherwise.

There is another narration that she asked the Prophet ﷺ why the men go out to fight and the women do not, and why a daughter's share of inheritance differs from a son's. Again she asked not to dispute but to understand. It is worth pausing here on what the wider tradition makes clear: Islam was the first system to give women a guaranteed share of inheritance at all, and the differences in shares track responsibilities rather than worth, for a man is obligated to spend on his family from his wealth while a woman keeps hers entirely as her own. According to one report, it was in response to this concern of hers that Allah revealed:

Do not covet what God has given to some of you more than others- men have the portion they have earned; and women the portion they have earned- you should rather ask God for some of His bounty: He has full knowledge of everything.

QUR'AN 4:32

The answer reframed the whole matter. This is not a measure of value, it teaches; it is a matter of roles and wisdom, and the door

is open to every soul to ask Allah from His bounty.

She was, in this, uniquely placed. The questions the community found difficult to raise, the matters touching marriage and intimacy and the private affairs of women, Umm Salama took on without shyness and without ambiguity, so that the ummah would understand them correctly. The verse declaring the people of the house, the Ahl al-Bayt, was revealed in her home and gathered in her family. And she was among the very few who saw the angel Jibril in human form, when he appeared in her house resembling a companion she recognized. Hers was a life lived close to the center of revelation, and she missed none of it.

A house that became a university

When the Prophet ﷺ passed away, Umm Salama gave the long years that remained to two things: worship, and teaching. Her home became a university of sorts. Companions and the generation after them came to her door for the narrations she carried from the Prophet ﷺ and for her fiqh. She was counted among the jurists of the companions, one of those who gave verdicts and answered the new questions that arose as the community grew. Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him), one of the great scholars of the ummah, was among her students, bringing her his hardest questions and finding her fully able to answer.

She narrated more from the Prophet ﷺ than any woman except Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her): three hundred and seventy-eight authentic narrations, thirteen of them agreed upon by the two great collections, with more recorded in each. When you hold in your hands what is known of the Prophet's home life, his marriage, his manners, and so much of what reached us about the early migration to Abyssinia, much of it reaches you

through her eyes and her tongue. She remembered, and because she remembered and taught, we know.

She was also the last of the mothers of the believers to die, in her nineties. Consider the span of what she witnessed: three migrations, the life and death of the Prophet ﷺ, the lives and deaths of all the rightly guided caliphs, on into a later and more troubled age. Her long life was a mercy to the ummah, because so many were able to learn directly from her. But it also meant she saw the fitna the Prophet ﷺ had warned of. She was deeply grieved by the killing of Ammar ibn Yasir (may Allah be pleased with him), whose death she herself had narrated a prophecy about, and she lived to see it come true. She grieved the loss of so many of the family of the Prophet ﷺ. There are painful reports that two of the sons of her own daughter Zaynab were killed and laid before her. She saw her children and grandchildren become soldiers, governors, and martyrs, and she witnessed both the victories and the wounds of her community, and held to her faith through all of it.

The daughter raised in his shadow

When she married the Prophet ﷺ, her youngest daughter Zaynab was still nursing, a very small girl. The only father Zaynab would truly know growing up was the Prophet ﷺ, and because she was a child living in his house, she spent more time with him than almost anyone. Here the promise he had made, your family is my family, became something you could see with your own eyes.

When the Prophet ﷺ came home to Umm Salama, he did not ask, where is Zaynab. He asked, where is our Zaynab. He claimed her, attributed her to himself. She would run to him and he would catch her and kiss her and play with her. Her uncle

Ammar ibn Yasir used to lift her as a small girl and tease that this was the one who had come between the Prophet ﷺ and his family, because he loved her so much that it was as though she had drawn all his attention to herself.

There is one narration that those with daughters should hold close. The Prophet ﷺ had a habit of playfully splashing water from his ablution into Zaynab's face. On one occasion she came to him while he was washing, and he scooped up water and tossed it gently at her face and said, go on back, laughing with her. A small thing, a moment of joy a man made for a child who was not his by blood and whom he treated entirely as his own. And something came from it that reads almost like a sign. Zaynab grew up to be called the most knowledgeable woman in Madinah, a teacher of giants: of Urwah ibn Zubayr, through whom so much of the seerah reaches us, and of Ali ibn al-Husayn, the great-grandson of the Prophet ﷺ. And it was said of her that from the day the Prophet ﷺ splashed water on her face, her face never aged. She grew old as her mother had, yet kept the youthfulness of that moment, and she attributed it to him. A girl who could say that her stepfather was the Prophet ﷺ, and that he never once let her feel she was anything less than his daughter.

The slave girl's son who became an imam

There is one more thread in her legacy that catches the whole light of what Islam came to do.

Hasan al-Basri (may Allah have mercy on him) rose to be called the master of the generation that followed the companions, one of the greatest of all the early scholars. And he was the son of two freed slaves. His father had been freed by Zayd ibn Thabit, who gathered the Qur'an. His mother, Khayrah, had been freed

by Umm Salama, and Hasan al-Basri was born in Umm Salama's house.

Think about where this religion began. Its first great enemy was tribalism and everything built upon it: the trade in human beings, the ranking of people by blood and clan, the worship of lineage. And here, in the house of one of the noblest women of the Arabs, the child of two former slaves is raised, suckled by Umm Salama herself when he cried as an infant, carried by her to sit among the companions of the Prophet ﷺ. Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) used to lift this child and pray for him. While Umm Salama taught the scholars and answered the ummah's questions, the boy who would teach the next century was growing up at her feet.

This was not an accident. This was the planning of Allah, not only for the family of the Prophet ﷺ but for his entire ummah. A woman's small room beside a mosque became a wellspring of knowledge that has watered the believers for fourteen centuries, much of it flowing through her without her name attached to every drop.

What Umm Salama's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like hers and feel only quiet admiration, and then to set it down and change nothing. That would be a loss. Her life is not an ornament. It is a question put to our own iman.

Notice first where her greatness actually lived. Not on a battlefield, not on a pulpit, but in a small room, in a remembered word, in a question asked sincerely, in a child treated with love. Most of us will never do anything the world calls large. Umm Salama's life is proof that this does not matter to Allah. She

moved a stuck ummah with one sentence of counsel and never sought credit for it. She raised children and a household into a fountain of knowledge. The good you can do for Allah is not waiting somewhere larger than your present life; it is in the room you are standing in, done sincerely, for Him. Ask whether you have been waiting for a grand occasion to serve Allah while the real occasions, the small ones, pass through your hands every day.

Notice, too, how she asked. She brought her hardest questions to Allah and His Messenger ﷺ from a heart that wanted to draw nearer, never from a heart that wanted to dispute. When something in the religion unsettled her, she did not turn away from it and she did not turn against it; she turned toward it and asked, trusting that the answer would increase her, and it did, so much that the Qur'an itself came down to settle her heart and the hearts of all who would come after. That is the posture of faith with the things we do not yet understand: not silent resentment, not stubborn objection, but a sincere question carried to the One who knows. Bring your confusions to Allah the way she did, and ask Him to open them, rather than letting them harden in the dark.

And notice what she did with everything she witnessed. She remembered. She watched the Prophet ﷺ with such care, such love, such attention, that she preserved his life for us, the way he prayed, the way he played with a child, the way he answered a frightened question. Hundreds of times the chain of a hadith passes through her name because she paid attention when others might have simply lived. There is a lesson in that for an ordinary believer: pay attention to the good around you, to the sunnah, to the words of the people of knowledge, and carry

them, and pass them on. What you preserve and teach for the sake of Allah can outlive you by centuries, as hers has.

Above all, her long life answers a fear that lives quietly in many hearts: that patience and faithfulness will go unrewarded, that a life of quiet service simply ends and is forgotten. She buried a beloved husband and was promised she would be with the best of husbands, the Prophet ﷺ, in Paradise. She kept his hair as a treasure and relished every trace of him she had left. She outlived nearly everyone she loved and saw her own grandchildren laid dead before her, and she held to her Lord through all of it. And meanwhile Allah was building, through her small room, a legacy that has fed His believers ever since. What looked like an old woman teaching in a modest house was in truth one of the great rivers of this religion. Nothing she gave to Allah was lost. Nothing you give to Him will be lost either.

So take one thing from her into your own ordinary life. Do one quiet good in the room you are in, for Allah, and seek no credit for it. Carry one confusion to Him as a sincere question instead of a complaint. Preserve and pass on one piece of true knowledge. That is how the mother who taught a nation lived, in sincerity, in trust, and in attentive love, and it is a way still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Umm Salama, raise us upon a measure of her wisdom and her faith, and gather us with her, and with the Prophet ﷺ she loved, in the gardens of Paradise.

This chapter follows the account of Umm Salama (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (33:35, 4:32). Where

the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Umm Salama

The Mother Who Was Given Better

There is a particular kind of suffering that has no enemy you can name. Not the sword, not the lash, but the slow tearing apart of a family, a husband pulled one way, a child pulled another, and a woman left in the middle holding nothing but a baby and her grief. This was the trial of Umm Salama (may Allah be pleased with her). And out of that trial came one of the most quietly astonishing promises in all of Islam: that whoever turns to Allah at the moment their world breaks, and asks Him for something better, will be given it. She lived that promise. She tested it with her own loss. And Allah answered her with more than she could have dared to ask.

To understand the weight of what she carried, you have to meet her before the breaking, in the comfort of a noble house, with the husband she loved at her side.

A daughter of a powerful house

Her name was Hind, and she was born into the tribe of Banu Makhzum, one of the most powerful clans of Quraysh. This is the tribe that produced Abu Jahl, the chief enemy of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. It is the tribe of Khalid ibn al-Walid, who would fight against the Muslims for years before becoming one of the great heroes of Islam. It was a clan that knew how to compete,

how to torture, and how to lead, and it eventually gave Islam some of its finest souls.

Her father, Abu Umayyah, was not just a tribesman of Makhzum. He was its chief. He was famous for his nobility and his generosity, and above all for his hospitality to the pilgrims and travellers who came to Makkah. When Banu Makhzum and Banu Hashim competed over who would feed and care for the visitors, it was Abu Umayyah who financed much of it. Hind grew up in the home of a man whom the whole city honoured.

Her family connections read like a map of early Islam. Her three brothers, Abdullah and al-Walid and Hisham, would all become companions, though they came to Islam later than she did, some in Madinah and one only at the conquest of Makkah. One of the beautiful turns in her story is that her brother, who accepted Islam at the conquest, would later narrate hadith from her, a brother learning the religion from his own sister. She preceded all of them. She was also, through the bond of breastfeeding, the sister of Ammar ibn Yasir, whose family was tortured for their faith and who would one day be killed, as the Prophet ﷺ foretold, by the transgressing army. So she stood at the meeting point of many lives: related by blood to the worst enemies of the message, and by milk to one of its purest martyrs.

Two who believed early

Her husband was Abu Salama, Abdullah ibn Abdul-Asad, also from Banu Makhzum. But he was more than a clansman. His mother was Barrah bint Abdul-Muttalib, the aunt of the Prophet ﷺ, which made Abu Salama the Prophet's first cousin. He was, as well, the Prophet's brother through breastfeeding. The closeness was old, from before Islam, woven through family and shared milk and shared blood.

When the call to Islam came, Abu Salama did not hesitate. He is counted among the very earliest believers, accepting Islam before the Prophet ﷺ even began gathering the companions in the house of al-Arqam. Some narrations place him as the eleventh person ever to accept Islam. To come in that early, before there was a community, before there was anywhere to gather, is one of the surest signs of how soon a heart turned. His wife followed close behind him, counted as the fourteenth or fifteenth to believe. They were already married when the light reached them, and they walked into it together.

We do not know the details of how Umm Salama herself first heard the call or first met the Prophet ﷺ. What we do know is far more telling. These two, husband and wife, were among the very first to leave everything for the sake of their faith. They are remembered as the first family to migrate to Abyssinia, fleeing the persecution of Makkah for the protection of a just Christian king. When a false rumour spread that Quraysh had embraced Islam, they returned home, only to find it untrue, and so they migrated a second time. Two hijras to Abyssinia, and later the hijra to Madinah. They are counted among the firsts to make all three migrations.

Their son, Salama, was born in that exile, a child of the believing community living far from home. And almost everything we know about those years in Abyssinia, the audience with the Negus, the story of the two armies, the companion sent swimming across the Nile to learn the outcome of a distant battle, comes to us through Umm Salama. She watched that history and she preserved it. Without her eyes and her memory, a whole chapter of the early ummah would have been lost to us.

The day the family was torn apart

What made her story famous, beyond even her later marriage, was what happened when the family came home. They had returned to Makkah preparing to join the Prophet ﷺ on the road to Madinah. They were staying as guests in the house of Abu Talib, the Prophet's uncle, so near were they to the household of the Messenger. They packed their belongings. They set out as a family: Abu Salama, Umm Salama, and the child Salama on the back of a camel.

They did not get far. Men of Banu Makhzum came and seized the reins. Some carried bows, some swords. Umm Salama was one of their own, the daughter of their late chief, the cousin of Abu Jahl and Khalid. Abu Salama they were willing to let go. But the woman and the child, they said, would stay. He could leave for his religion if he wished. She belonged to them.

A scuffle broke out. They forced the family apart, prying Abu Salama away from his wife and son and sending him off alone on the road to Madinah. And so a family that had been together since before Islam, through two migrations across the sea, was split in an afternoon. Umm Salama was left holding her child, weeping.

Then it grew worse. The clan of Abu Salama heard what had happened, and this was no longer about religion at all. It was about pride. If Makhzum would keep the wife, then Abu Salama's family would take the child, for the child is ascribed to his father, and the father was one of theirs. They came to claim the boy. Another fight broke out. Salama was still nursing, still a baby. They pulled at him so hard, dragging him from his screaming mother's arms, that they dislocated his shoulder. And the boy was taken.

In a single day, this woman had lost her husband to one road and her son to another. She had nothing left to hold.

A year at the edge of the city

What she did with that loss is one of the most moving things in her whole life. Every single day, Umm Salama would walk out toward the place where her family had been torn apart, near the edge of the city, and she would weep. She would tell the story again, of the husband taken from her and the child taken from her. She would cry out to Allah. She would ask Him, day after day, for a way out.

She did this not for a week, not for a month, but for an entire year. A year of going to the same place, carrying the same grief, and turning it, every time, toward her Lord. This is worth pausing on, because it is the seed of everything that came after. She did not let the bitterness harden into despair. She let it carry her, again and again, to Allah.

Eventually, some of her own relatives began to soften. They saw her pain and they asked, in effect, what harm is there in letting her go? Her husband was already gone. Why hold the poor woman captive? So at last they relented. The family of Abu Salama returned her son to her, and Banu Makhzum told her she was free to leave and join her husband.

She did not wait, and she did not ask for an escort. She took her camel, set her little boy on its back, and set out for Madinah alone. This was a journey of weeks across open and dangerous country. She could have been waylaid by robbers. The child could have died on the road. She could have lost her way and never been found. None of it stopped her. She wanted her family and her faith, and she went.

The noblest man on the road

She tells the story herself. She had ridden only a few miles out, to Tan'im, when she met a man named Uthman ibn Talha. He was a nobleman of Makkah, the keeper of the keys of the Kaaba, but he was not yet a Muslim. He had no part in the mission that was drawing her away from her people. He saw a woman and a baby alone on a camel, heading out into the wilderness, and he stopped.

"Where are you going, daughter of Abu Umayyah?" he asked.

"To Madinah," she said, "to my husband."

"Is there no one with you?"

"No one," she answered, "but Allah, and this child of mine."

He said, "By Allah, you will not be left alone." What kind of man, he said, would let her go out and do this by herself? And he took the reins of her camel and walked.

Listen to how she describes him, because she never forgot it. She said she had never met any Arab more noble than that man. He would not look at her and he would not speak to her beyond what was needed. When they reached a stopping place, he would make the camel kneel, then withdraw far away and turn his back, giving her space to dismount and rest in privacy. When it was time to move on, he would bring the camel near, then stand off at a distance until she had mounted, and only then come back and take the reins. He did this at every stop, the whole way.

And here is the detail that should stay with you. This man had no camel of his own. He made the entire journey from Makkah to Madinah on foot. For a woman who was not his relative. For a faith he did not yet hold. Out of nothing but the nobility of his character.

When at last they reached Quba, on the outskirts of Madinah, he pointed to the settlement where her husband's people were and said, "Your husband is in this village. Enter it with the blessing of Allah." Then this noble man simply turned around and walked back to Makkah, again on foot. He did not go to Abu Salama to be thanked or paid. He did not ask for so much as a coin or a mount for the return. He had brought a stranded woman and her child across the desert because his sense of honour demanded it, and then he went home.

Contrast him with the men who tore the family apart out of arrogance and ego. And then watch how Allah deals with such a man. Years later, when the Prophet ﷺ entered Makkah in triumph and the keys of the Kaaba were placed in his hands, everyone expected his own clan to keep them. Instead the Prophet ﷺ called for Uthman ibn Talha, placed the keys back in his hands, and declared that they would remain with him and his descendants forever, and that only an oppressor would take them away. To this day, the keys of the Kaaba pass down through his family. This is how the Prophet ﷺ honoured character over lineage, undoing the whole hierarchy of his age. And it is how Allah repaid a man who once asked for nothing: not with coins, but with an honour that has outlived empires.

The du'a that was waiting for her

In Madinah the family was whole again. Abu Salama, Umm Salama, and Salama were reunited, and over the next years more children came, one nearly every year: the daughters Zaynab and Durrah, and a son, Umar, among them. Abu Salama took his place as a close and beloved companion of the Prophet ﷺ. He had made the three migrations, and now he fought at Badr, earning

the lofty rank of the veterans of that battle. Then he fought bravely at Uhud, and there he was wounded.

One day during those years, Abu Salama came home full of joy. He told his wife that he had heard the Prophet ﷺ say something more beloved to him than anything else. The Prophet ﷺ had taught them a du'a for the moment of calamity: that whoever, when struck by affliction, says "We belong to Allah and to Him we shall return. O Allah, reward me in my affliction and give me something better than it in its place," Allah will indeed give them something better. Abu Salama was simply delighted to have learned it. He had no idea that he was teaching his own wife the very words she would say when he died.

The words sit inside the Qur'an's own description of those who are tested and remain steadfast:

We shall certainly test you with fear and hunger, and loss of property, lives, and crops. But [Prophet], give good news to those who are steadfast, those who say, when afflicted with a calamity, 'We belong to God and to Him we shall return.' These will be given blessings and mercy from their Lord, and it is they who are rightly guided.

QUR'AN 2:155-157

The wounds of Uhud did not heal. Months later, after struggling on and off, even setting out on another expedition, Abu Salama's wounds reopened, and he began to die. Umm Salama narrates his final moments. The Prophet ﷺ came and stood over his beloved companion. As often happens at the edge of death, Abu Salama's gaze fixed and his breathing failed. With his own two fingers the Prophet ﷺ closed the eyes of his friend, and explained that the sight follows the soul as it departs. Then, as the family began to weep, he told them gently to say only good,

because the angels say "amin" to whatever is spoken in such a moment. And he made du'a: "O Allah, forgive Abu Salama, raise his rank among the rightly guided, be a successor for those he leaves behind, and make his grave spacious and fill it with light." He led the funeral prayer for him with nine takbirs, a rare honour. Abu Salama was a martyr, a man of three migrations, the eleventh to believe, and the Prophet's own brother in milk.

And in that moment of grief, Umm Salama remembered. The man lying dead before her had taught her, from the Prophet ﷺ, the du'a for exactly this. So she said it: "We belong to Allah and to Him we shall return. O Allah, reward me in my affliction and give me something better than it." But even as the words left her, her heart protested. Who, she thought, could be better than Abu Salama? He was a noble man, a great Muslim, a beloved husband. She said the du'a as she was taught, and yet she could not imagine its answer.

Allah gave her better. Not at once, for she was a widow with young children and a heart full of old pain. Abu Bakr proposed to her, and she refused. Umar proposed, and she refused him too. To her, no companion could equal Abu Salama. But then came the one proposal she could not measure against him, for she could not claim that anyone was better than the Messenger of Allah himself. The Prophet ﷺ sent to ask for her hand.

She answered with three honest fears. She was, she said, a deeply jealous woman, unused to a household shared with others. She was, she said, no longer young. And she had children to raise. The Prophet's reply met each one with tenderness. As for her jealousy, he would pray that Allah remove it from her. As for her age, he too was advanced in years; they were the same in that. And as for her children, he said simply, "They are my

family." Her family would be his family, treated no differently in the household of the Messenger of Allah.

So Allah answered the du'a she had barely been able to believe. He gave her, in place of a husband she thought could not be surpassed, the one man who surpassed all of creation. And He kept the promise to her children too. Her daughter Zaynab would grow up close to the Prophet ﷺ. When he once gathered Fatima, Ali, Hasan, and Husayn under his cloak and prayed for the people of his household, Umm Salama wept at the edge of it, and asked if she was included. He told her, "You and your daughter are from my family." It was never lip service. It was the truth of how he loved them.

What Umm Salama's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this as a story with a happy ending, and to stop there. But her life is not a story to be admired from a distance. It is a question put to your own heart about what you do when everything is taken from you.

She turned her grief into du'a. For a year, she carried a wound that had no name and no remedy, a family torn into three, and instead of letting it sour into despair or rage, she walked it out to Allah, day after day after day. This is the first thing her life asks of you. When something breaks in your life, where do your feet carry you, and where does your complaint go? She teaches that the right answer to loss is not to bury it or to be crushed by it, but to bring it, again and again, to the only One who can answer. Persistence in du'a is itself a kind of faith. It says: I still believe You are listening, even now.

She trusted Allah's promise before she could see how it would come true. Think of her saying the du'a for "something better"

with her husband's body in front of her, while her own heart whispered that nothing could be better. She said it anyway. That is the essence of trust in Allah, to act on His promise before the outcome is visible, to ask for the good He has guaranteed even when your eyes can see only loss. Most of us pray and then quietly assume the door is closed. She prayed, doubted in her heart, and was answered beyond imagining, precisely because she obeyed before she understood.

She set out alone, with no one but Allah. When she mounted that camel with her baby and rode into the desert, she had no protector, no escort, no plan for the dangers of the road. She had only her Lord, and that was enough to make her move. And Allah did not leave her alone; He sent her the noblest man on that road. This is the quiet lesson under her whole journey: tie your camel and then go, do the hard thing for His sake, and trust that the One you are walking toward will provide the help you cannot arrange for yourself. Reliance on Allah, *tawakkul*, is not sitting still. It is stepping out, with Him.

And here is the promise that should change how you face your own hardest days. Nothing Umm Salama gave to Allah was lost, and nothing she suffered for Him went unanswered. The years of weeping, the dislocated child, the lonely desert, the dead husband she loved, all of it became the path by which she entered the household of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and became a Mother of the Believers. The du'a of "something better" is still open. It is reported from the Prophet ﷺ himself, and it was tested by a woman who could not believe it and was proven right.

So take something small from her into your ordinary life. The next time something is taken from you, before you reach for anger or for despair, say the words she said: that you belong to Allah, that

to Him you return, and that you ask Him to reward you and give you better. Mean it for His sake, not as a bargain, but as trust. Then keep turning to Him, the way she did for a year, without giving up. That is how this Mother of the Believers met the worst day of her life, and it is a door still open to anyone willing to walk through it. May Allah be pleased with Umm Salama, grant us a measure of her trust and her patience, and give us all better than that which is taken from us in this world.

This chapter follows the account of Umm Salama (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2:155-157). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed; the man who escorted her is named in the seerah as Uthman ibn Talha.

An-Najashi (Ashama ibn Abjar)

The Righteous King Who Believed Unseen

There is a kind of faith that grows beside the Prophet ﷺ, watered by his presence, corrected by his words, carried along by the company of believers who pray the same prayers and weep at the same verses. And then there is a rarer kind: faith that takes root in a man who never once saw the Prophet ﷺ, never sat in his gathering, never learned the rulings of the religion from his lips, and who believed across a sea, with a crown on his head and an empire to lose. That second kind is harder, and lonelier, and in some ways more astonishing. It is the faith of An-Najashi.

His name was Ashama ibn Abjar, and Najashi, like Caesar or Khosrow, was not a name but a title, borne by the kings of Abyssinia, the land we now call Ethiopia. To understand why the Prophet ﷺ trusted this distant Christian king with the most precious people in the early ummah, you have to meet the man before Jafar ever stood in his court.

A just king before the message reached him

By the time the persecuted Muslims of Makkah arrived on his shores, An-Najashi (may Allah be pleased with him) was already known across the region for something the world is always short of: justice. His empire had embraced orthodox Christianity in the fourth century, an island of Christianity in a sea of idolatry. And he was no mere ruler of it. He was a scholar of his faith, a

worshipper, a man celebrated for his righteousness and his character long before a word of revelation reached him.

The Prophet ﷺ taught that people are like precious stones, and that the best of them in the days of ignorance are the best of them in Islam, when they are given understanding. The good that is in a person before guidance is not erased by guidance; it is polished. So when the Prophet ﷺ pointed his frightened, hunted followers toward this king they had never met, he described him with a single, weighty sentence: there is a ruler there who will not tolerate injustice. That reputation had crossed the desert and the sea before the Muslims did.

His very name carried a quiet sign. Ashama, in Arabic, is the equivalent of atiyah, a gift. And the title Najashi comes from a root meaning increase, the overflowing bounty of his station. A gift, and an abundance. He would prove to be both, though the road to his throne was anything but gentle.

The boy who was sold, and the throne that found him again

The story behind An-Najashi reached the Muslims through Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), narrated down to us through her nephew Urwah ibn az-Zubayr, whose own father had lived among the refugees in Abyssinia. It is a story that explains everything that came after.

Ashama's father was the king, and Ashama was his only son. His paternal uncle, by contrast, had twelve sons. Some of the Abyssinians, calculating that a kingdom resting on one heir was a fragile thing, plotted to murder the king so the throne would pass to the uncle and his twelve sons, securing the line for generations. They killed Ashama's father while Ashama was still a

young boy, too young to grasp what had been taken from him, and the uncle took the throne.

So the orphaned son of a murdered king grew up in the household of the man who had arranged that murder, raised among the twelve cousins who had inherited what should have been his. And as he grew, he outshone every one of them, in intellect, in strength, in judgment, in every talent, and grew perceptive enough to understand, slowly, what had been done to his father and why.

His brilliance became a danger. Advisers warned the uncle: this boy is too capable; if you let him live, he will one day take the throne back from you. The uncle, who had blood enough on his hands, refused to kill him but agreed to be rid of him another way. They seized Ashama in the night, carried him to the slave market, and sold him for six hundred dirhams. A merchant put him on a boat and set out to sea.

And on that very night, the heavens turned. The sky over the kingdom filled with clouds but withheld its rain, and the people begged their king, the uncle, to pray for relief. He gathered them, stood beneath those heavy clouds, and prayed, and Allah sent down a bolt of lightning that struck him dead where he stood.

Now the throne passed to his sons, exactly as the plotters had wished, and the sons proved utterly incompetent. The people, ruled badly, grew desperate and turned back to the only name that promised wisdom: find Ashama, the boy we discarded, and make him king. They sent out a search for the one they had thrown into slavery, recovered him from his master, returned him across the water, set a crown upon his head, and gave him their allegiance willingly. Everything that had been done to keep him

from the throne had, by the hand of Allah, delivered him straight to it.

There is a final detail that tells you the measure of him. The merchant who had bought Ashama came to Abyssinia to protest, not knowing the king and the slave were one and the same, and demanded his money or his property back. An-Najashi turned to his people and said simply: give the man back his six hundred dirhams, or give him back the one he purchased. They returned his money, and the man went on his way. The king, who could have had the merchant silenced, chose instead to be fair to the man who had once owned him.

Hold that whole life in your mind before Jafar arrives, because the king who is about to be tested in his own court already knows, in his body and his memory, exactly what it is to be wronged for the sake of someone else's gain, and exactly Who it was that rescued him.

The refugees, the bribe, and the king who listened to both sides
When the believers fled the cruelty of Quraysh and reached Abyssinia, An-Najashi received them as a just man receives the wronged. Umm Salama (may Allah be pleased with her), who lived through it and narrated it, said the king told them plainly that they could worship in safety, suffer no injustice, and never be made to feel like foreigners. He knew nothing yet of their religion. He knew only that here was a people who had fled persecution, and that was enough for him to open his land to them. "We were in goodness," she said.

Then Quraysh sent two men, Amr ibn al-As and Abdullah ibn Abi Rabi'ah, loaded with leather and skins and gifts, determined to drag the refugees home. Amr had an old relationship with the

king, and he worked the court cleverly, winning over the generals first, then approaching the king with a tidy slander: some foolish people from our land have taken refuge with you; they have abandoned our religion and not entered yours; they have invented something new that neither you nor we accept; send them back to their own.

An-Najashi answered with anger. By Allah, he said, I will not surrender them. No one who seeks my protection, settles in my land, and trusts me will be betrayed. But, he said, I will hear their case. If they are as you say, I will hand them over. If not, they remain here under my protection. He would not be moved by gifts, nor condemn the absent without listening. So he summoned the Muslims.

It was here that Jafar ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) rose and gave the speech that has echoed for fourteen centuries. He told the king who they had been: a people sunk in ignorance and idolatry, eating dead flesh, committing shameful deeds, severing the bonds of kinship, mistreating the guest, the strong devouring the weak. Then Allah sent a Messenger from among them, whose lineage and truthfulness they already knew, who called them to worship Allah alone, abandon the idols, and hold to honesty, kindness to kin, and care for the neighbour. Every quality Jafar named was a quality this Christian king already revered.

The king was moved, and he asked: do you have with you anything of what was revealed to your Prophet? And Jafar recited from Surah Maryam, the chapter that tells of Mary and the birth of Jesus (peace be upon him). As the verses fell, An-Najashi wept until his beard was wet with tears, and his bishops wept

with him. This is the moment the mufasssirun connect to the words Allah revealed about such people:

and when they listen to what has been sent down to the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears because they recognize the Truth [in it]. They say, 'Our Lord, we believe, so count us amongst the witnesses.

QUR'AN 5:83

The king lifted his head and said that what Jafar had brought and what Jesus had brought came from the same niche of light. He turned to the two men of Quraysh and dismissed them.

Not by the length of a stick

Amr ibn al-As did not surrender. Abdullah ibn Abi Rabi'ah urged him to let it go, these were their own kin after all, but Amr knew where to strike. He requested a second audience and told the king: ask them what they say about Jesus. He was certain this would shatter the king's sympathy, because the Muslims would not call Jesus the begotten son of God.

The Muslims were summoned again. An-Najashi asked, and Jafar did not soften it. He said that Jesus is the servant of Allah and His Messenger, His word which He cast into the womb of Mary the pure, and His spirit.

The king reached down, took a stick from the ground, and drew a line in the dirt. By Allah, he said, Jesus son of Mary does not exceed what you have said by the length of this stick. It was a quiet sentence, and it was an earthquake, for it set aside the doctrine his bishops had held all their lives. The generals around him began to grunt in displeasure. Let them grunt, the king said; I do not care. He turned to Jafar and said, three times, that the

Muslims were safe in his land and that whoever cursed them would be punished. Not for a mountain of gold, he said, would he allow anyone to harm them. These were foreigners with no claim of blood on him, and already he was treating them as a brotherhood of faith.

Then he gave the order that revealed the whole man. To the envoys of Quraysh: give them back everything they brought. And he said the words that became famous:

Allah did not take a bribe from me when He gave me back my kingdom, so how can I take a bribe for it? And Allah did not do what they wanted Him to do against me, so how could I do what they want me to do against him?

There it was, the orphan once sold for six hundred dirhams, rescued from chains and seated on a throne by no hand but Allah's, refusing now to sell the truth for a heap of skins and silver. He had learned the hard way Who owns kingdoms and Who gives them.

Faith carried alone, across the sea

When the court had emptied and only the king and Jafar remained, An-Najashi drew close. Jafar carried a letter from the Prophet ﷺ inviting him to Islam. The king said: I bear witness that he is the Messenger of God, the one whom Jesus, son of Mary, foretold. And had I not been weighed down by this kingdom, I would go to him myself and carry his sandals.

He believed. A reigning emperor, a Christian scholar surrounded by Christian bishops, believed in a Prophet he had never met, in a religion he could only know through letters and refugees. And he kept it close, not out of weakness but out of wisdom, because the safety of the Muslims in his land depended on his throne, and

his throne depended on the loyalty of a people who did not share his conviction.

So he lived a double weight. He furnished a full ship for Jafar and the others and told them: if I am ever overthrown, take this ship and escape to safety; as long as Allah keeps me here, you are free to live in goodness. When rebels rose against him and the two armies met by the Nile, the Muslims watched from a distance, praying, O Allah, grant him victory, knowing their own safety hung on his. Az-Zubayr, the youngest and the strongest, swam the river to bring back word, and when he raised his cry of Allahu akbar, they knew the righteous king had won. Umm Salama said she did not think they had ever been so relieved.

When the believer Umm Habibah was left alone in Abyssinia, the Prophet ﷺ wrote to An-Najashi himself, asking the king to act as his representative and conduct the marriage on his behalf. The king did, gathering the Muslims in his palace, paying the dowry from his own treasury, standing in the place of the Prophet ﷺ. And when his own people pressed him about what he had said of Jesus, he wrote the testimony of faith on a slip of paper, that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad and Jesus are both His servants and messengers, and hid it against his chest beneath his armour. When they asked him what he believed of Jesus, he pointed to his heart and said, I believe nothing more than this. They thought he was affirming their creed. He was affirming the shahadah pressed to his skin.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing he ever did was give da'wah to a man who would shape Islamic history. When Amr ibn al-As came once more to Abyssinia, still an enemy of the Prophet ﷺ, the king spoke to him plainly as an old friend: you would do better to follow him, for he is the Messenger of Allah, the one

visited by the great angel who came to Moses, and he will be given victory as Moses was over Pharaoh. Amr was stunned. Is he truly the Messenger of Allah? he asked. He is, said the king. And Amr ibn al-As resolved, at the word of a king who had never met the Prophet ﷺ, to go and accept Islam.

The funeral prayer for the absent

For the rest of his life the letters passed back and forth across the water. In one that survives, An-Najashi wrote to the Prophet ﷺ: peace be upon you, Messenger of Allah; by the Lord of the heavens and the earth, Jesus is no more than what you say; I bear witness that you are the Messenger of Allah, and I pledge myself, through your cousin Jafar, to the Lord of all the worlds. The kingdom never distracted him from the truth, because he knew it was Allah who had humbled him and Allah who had raised him, and such a gift is not turned against the Giver.

Then, around the ninth year after the Hijrah, the angel Jibril came to the Prophet ﷺ and told him that on that very day a righteous man had died in a far land. The Prophet ﷺ gathered the companions in Madinah and said: today a righteous man has died, so pray for your brother. And he led them in the funeral prayer, four times magnifying Allah, over a man whose body lay across the sea. It is the one time recorded that the Prophet ﷺ prayed the funeral prayer over someone absent. Imagine the rows of believers in Madinah, their voices rising for a king who had sheltered them when no one else would, that prayer reaching at last the man who had longed to carry his sandals.

The scholars still discuss what An-Najashi was: a Companion in some senses, certainly the best of those who came after them, the first king to embrace Islam, the first to be prayed over while absent. A weak but beautiful narration from Aisha (may Allah be

pleased with her) records that those who visited his grave in Abyssinia would say a light was always seen upon it.

What this king's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read the life of An-Najashi and feel only the thrill of the story, the orphan and the throne, the king who wept, the line drawn in the dirt. But his life is not a tale to enjoy. It is a question pressed against our own iman.

He believed in what he could not see. He never met the Prophet ﷺ. He had no community of believers around him to make faith feel natural, no daily prayer learned at the Prophet's side, no slow schooling in the religion. He had a few recited verses, a letter, the testimony of some refugees, and the witness of his own heart, and on that he staked his soul and his crown. Most of us want our faith made easy before we give it: clear proof, good company, a path already worn smooth. He had almost none of that and believed anyway. Ask yourself how much of your certainty about Allah depends on the people around you, and what would remain if you, like him, had to carry it almost alone. The faith that survives in solitude is the faith that is truly yours.

He would not be bought, because he knew Who owned everything he had. The sentence at the centre of his life, that Allah did not take a bribe from him when He returned his kingdom, so he would never take a bribe for it, is the sentence of a man who never forgot that his power was a loan. We are bribed in smaller ways every day: a little dishonesty for a little gain, silence about the truth where speaking it would cost us, bending the deen to keep people comfortable. The cure is exactly his: to remember, in your bones, that everything you hold was given by Allah and can be taken by Allah, so that no amount of the world is worth turning against the One who gave it. Sincerity, ikhlas, is

finally this: doing the right thing for Allah even when the wrong thing pays better.

He used his position for the truth instead of letting the truth bow to his position. Whatever Allah has placed in your hands, influence, money, a job, a household, a single relationship, his life asks the same question of you that it answered for him: will you spend it for the truth, or protect your comfort and let the truth wait? You can do the smaller version of what he did today. Shelter someone who has been wronged. Speak one honest word that costs you something. Use a little of what you have, quietly, for the sake of Allah and no one's applause.

And take heart from how his story ended, because nothing he did for Allah was wasted. The boy thrown into slavery was returned to a throne. The king who hid his faith was prayed over by the Prophet ﷺ himself, his name remembered until the end of time. What looked like a lonely, hidden belief in a far country was seen, the whole time, by the One who matters, and honoured in a way no living believer was honoured. That is the promise that should steady you: Allah sees the faith you carry where no one else can, and He does not forget it.

May Allah be pleased with Ashama An-Najashi, and may He grant us a measure of his certainty in the unseen, his refusal to be bought, and his quiet, unwitnessed service. And may Allah gather us with him and with the Prophet ﷺ and the companions in the company they could not keep in this life, in the Gardens of Firdaws.

This chapter follows the account of An-Najashi, Ashama ibn Abjar (RA), in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem

(5:83). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Jafar ibn Abi Talib

The One With Two Wings

There are some companions who are easy to overlook, not because they did little, but because they stood beside someone so famous that the eye slides past them. Jafar ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) is one of these. He was the brother of Ali, the cousin of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, raised in the same house of poverty as some of the noblest names in Islam. It would be easy to remember him only as someone's relative, only as a face in the background of a more famous story.

That would be a mistake. Jafar was not a man who borrowed his greatness from others. He earned his own. He was among the first to believe. He was the leader of the migrants to Abyssinia, the first Muslim to give dawah to a king, the first at whose words a king came toward Islam, the first to recite the Qur'an in a royal court. And he was among the first commanders to be martyred in battle, falling in a way that would earn him a name no one else in this ummah carries. To understand him, we have to begin where he began, in a crowded house in Makkah, with a father trying to feed his children.

The house of Abu Talib

His mother was Fatimah bint Asad (may Allah be pleased with her), the first woman of Banu Hashim to accept Islam, by some accounts the tenth or eleventh person to believe at all. She was

the woman the Prophet ﷺ called his mother, who had helped raise him from the age of six, who would stand to receive him when he came to her. She loved Jafar with a particular tenderness, and there was a reason for it: of all the cousins of the Prophet ﷺ, no one resembled him more closely than Jafar. To look at her son was, in a sense, to look at the orphan she had raised as her own.

His father, Abu Talib, named his four sons with care, and the names read like aspirations laid out across a generation. There were ten years between each of them. Talib, the eldest, the same age as the Prophet ﷺ, was named for high ambition. Aqil, ten years younger, for keen intellect. Then Jafar, whose name means a flowing river, a stream of milk, abundance and eloquence and overflowing compassion. And last came Ali, named for nobility. It is worth pausing on the fact that these were not idle labels. Each son, in his own way, grew into the meaning of his name. Jafar would one day be remembered for speech so clear and so moving that it could turn a king's heart, and for a generosity that poured out of him like water.

Abu Talib was a generous man, but he was poor, and poverty in a large family is a daily weight. So one day the Prophet ﷺ and his uncle Al-Abbas, both of whom were by then in comfortable circumstances, came to lighten that weight. They proposed to take two of the children into their own homes to raise. Abu Talib, who loved Aqil in a special way, told them they could take whomever they wished, only to leave him Aqil. And so the Prophet ﷺ took Ali into his home, and Al-Abbas took Jafar into his.

This small arrangement shaped everything. Ali grew up in the household of the Prophet ﷺ as a near-son. Jafar, ten years

older, grew up in the home of Al-Abbas, also loved like a son, but the difference in their ages meant the Prophet ﷺ related to him not as a child to be raised but as a younger brother to be loved. There is a quiet lesson in this for us, in an age when families scatter and cousins become strangers. The closeness between the Prophet ﷺ and Jafar was the closeness of extended kin, of maintaining the ties of the womb beyond one's own siblings and children, and it ran deep enough to last a lifetime and beyond.

Among the first to believe

When Islam came, Jafar did not hesitate. Some reports place him as early as the fifteenth or sixteenth person to accept the message. We do not have the exact date, but we know it was very early, and we know there was no wavering in him. He and his wife, Asma bint Umais (may Allah be pleased with her), embraced Islam together, the way Said ibn Zayd and his wife did, two hearts turning toward Allah at once. Asma was one of the believing sisters, one of those early Muslim women who gave themselves entirely to the cause of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ, and she would be at Jafar's side through everything that came.

We know little of their life in Makkah before what came next, only that they were among the family of the Prophet ﷺ and shared in the persecution that fell on the believers. For Jafar and Asma the cruelty grew so severe that they sought permission to leave the city of their birth and migrate for the sake of Allah to Abyssinia, the land we now call Ethiopia. They were of the second group to make that journey. But Allah and His Messenger ﷺ honored Jafar by choosing him to lead it.

The leader of the migrants

Consider what the Prophet ﷺ was risking. The group bound for Abyssinia included some of the finest of his companions: Uthman and the Prophet's own daughter Ruqayyah, Zubayr ibn al-Awwam, Abu Salamah and Umm Salamah, and others whose names ring through the seerah. These were not expendable. To send them across the sea into the court of a foreign king was to gamble with the heart of the early community. If the king turned on them, the Prophet ﷺ would have lost his finest believers in a single stroke.

And yet he sent them, and he chose as their spokesman a man in his early twenties: Jafar. This is one of the marks of the Prophet's leadership, the way he saw the worth in the young and entrusted them with weight far beyond their years. He had never met the king of Abyssinia, An-Najashi, whose name was As-hama. But he knew of the man's character, and through the guidance of Allah he told his companions: go to Abyssinia, for its king will not tolerate injustice, and it is a land of truth, so stay there until Allah relieves you. He even sent with Jafar an invitation to Islam for the king himself, trusting that the truth would find a home in a righteous heart.

The believers settled in the land, and An-Najashi gave them refuge, though he did not at first accept their faith. But Makkah would not let them go so easily. Quraysh sent two of their most capable men after them, Amr ibn al-As and Abdullah ibn Abi Rabi'a, carrying gifts of leather and fine cloth for the king and for each of his generals. Amr had an old friendship with An-Najashi that reached back before Islam, and he meant to use every advantage: the bribes, the diplomacy, the personal bond, and a religious angle. He told the king that these refugees were fools who had abandoned both the religion of their own people and the religion of the Christians, that they insulted his faith as much as

they insulted the idols. It was a careful, layered attack, designed to reach the king's pride, his interests, and his piety all at once.

So An-Najashi summoned the Muslims to his court. And there, in that intimidating hall, with the future of the believers resting on what he would say, Jafar stepped forward.

The speech in the court

What Jafar said that day is among the most beautiful summaries of Islam ever spoken. The king asked him to describe his religion, and Jafar answered:

"O King, we were a people in a state of ignorance and immorality, worshipping idols, eating the flesh of dead animals, breaking the ties of kinship, treating our guests badly, and the strong among us exploited the weak. We remained in this state until Allah sent us a prophet, one of our own, whose lineage, truthfulness, trustworthiness, and integrity were well known to us. He called us to worship Allah alone and to renounce the idols which we and our ancestors used to worship beside Him. He commanded us to speak the truth, to honor our promises, to be kind to our relatives and good to our neighbors, to abstain from bloodshed and false witness, not to take the property of an orphan, nor slander chaste women, to uphold prayer, to give charity, and to fast in Ramadan. We believed in him and in what he brought from Allah. Thereupon, O King, our people attacked us. They tormented us to make us renounce our religion and return to the old immorality, until life became intolerable, so we left for your land, choosing you above all others, desiring your protection and hoping to live in justice and peace in your midst."

Hear how much he carried in so few words. The state of a people before guidance, the coming of a trustworthy man, the call to the

One God, the whole shape of a moral life, and the plea of the persecuted. He lived up to his name. The river flowed.

An-Najashi was moved. He asked whether Jafar had any of the revelation that had come to his prophet. And Jafar chose, of all that he might have recited, the opening of Surah Maryam, the story of Mary and the birth of her son Jesus, peace be upon them. He began where the surah begins:

Mention in the Quran the story of Mary. She withdrew from her family to a place to the east.

QUR'AN 19:16

He recited on, through the honor of Maryam, through the birth of Isa, through the infant who spoke from the cradle. When he finished and looked up, the king was weeping, and tears ran down the faces of his generals. An-Najashi took up a stick and said that what Jesus had brought and what Jafar had just recited came from the very same source, that the two were not separated by even the length of that stick. Then he turned to the men of Quraysh: by God, he said, I will never hand these people over to you. He returned their gifts and sent them home defeated. They tried once more, returning the next day to tell the king that these Muslims said something terrible about Jesus, calling him merely a creature. But when An-Najashi questioned them, Jafar and his companions answered plainly that Jesus was the servant of Allah, His messenger, His word, and the Messiah, and the king was satisfied once more. Not for a mountain of gold, he said, would he allow them to be harmed.

After the court emptied, the king confided to Jafar what he had kept hidden: that he himself had believed.

A decade away, and a reunion

So the believers were safe, and they stayed. Jafar and Asma would remain in Abyssinia for ten years, by some accounts twelve. All three of their sons, Abdullah, Muhammad, and Awn, were born there in that foreign land. They raised a family as a minority far from home, and in doing so they missed an enormous stretch of the seerah. They were not in Makkah for its hardest years, nor in the first migration to Madinah. They were absent through Badr, through Uhud, through the trench of Khandaq. Their portion of Islam was a long, patient exile, carried for the sake of Allah alone.

Jafar finally made his way to Madinah at the time of Khaybar, years into the Madinan period. When he arrived, the Prophet ﷺ kissed him between his eyes and could barely contain his joy. He embraced him and said, "I do not know which of the two gives me greater joy, the coming of Jafar or the conquest of Khaybar." Two pieces of good news arriving together, and the return of this beloved cousin weighed as heavily in his heart as a great victory. He had his brother back, the one who looked like him, the one he had missed for a decade.

We get only a brief window onto Jafar's life among the believers in Madinah, because nearly all of his Muslim life had been lived far away. But what we see in that window is luminous.

Abu al-Masakin, the father of the poor

When Hamza was martyred at Uhud, his young daughter was left behind, and three men each wished to raise her: Ali, Zayd ibn Harithah, and Jafar. The Prophet ﷺ settled it with a word of love for each. To Ali he said, "You are from me and I am from you." To Zayd he said, "You are our brother and our freed one." And to

Jafar he said that he had the greatest right to the child, because his wife Asma was the girl's maternal aunt, and the maternal aunt holds the place of the mother. Then he added something he would say to Jafar more than once, recorded in al-Bukhari: "You resemble me most, in your appearance and in your character." There is hardly a higher praise a human being could receive. Not only your face is like mine, but your inner self, your khuluq, is like mine.

What was that character? Abu Hurayrah, who knew so many of the companions, said that no one who ever put on a sandal or rode a mount was better than Jafar ibn Abi Talib after the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. And he told us why. They used to call Jafar Abu al-Masakin, the father of the poor. He would draw the poor close to him. He would sit with them, and listen to them, and let them speak to him as equals. Whatever he had, he gave. Abu Hurayrah described coming to him one day when Jafar had nothing left in his house but a jar of honey, so he broke the jar open and they licked what honey remained from it. Anything he possessed, he gave away.

Notice carefully what this means. Jafar was not remembered as the wealthiest giver among the companions. He lived in a city that held Abu Bakr and Uthman and Abd al-Rahman ibn Awf, men whose generosity was legendary. His distinction was not the size of his charity. It was his love of the poor. Abu Hurayrah, himself one of the poor of the Suffah, felt that love and recognized it, and it set Jafar apart even in such company. The Prophet ﷺ used to ask Allah for the love of the poor, and here was the man he called most like himself in character, known precisely for that quality. Jafar did not return from exile with the swagger of a leader who had won over a king. He came back as humble as the day he

believed, carrying the same mercy that the mercy to the worlds, Muhammad ﷺ, was known for.

Mu'ta, and the two wings

It was only a short time later that Jafar took part in his first battle under the Prophet ﷺ, and it was his last. The Byzantines had killed an emissary of the Prophet ﷺ, and an army was sent north to confront them at Mu'ta, in what is now Jordan. Before they left, the Prophet ﷺ did something the scholars found unusual. He named not one commander but a line of them: Zayd ibn Harithah first, and if Zayd fell, then Jafar, and if Jafar fell, then Abdullah ibn Rawahah, and if he too fell, the men were to choose the best among them. That the Prophet ﷺ spoke openly of such possibilities, of one commander dying after another, suggested he knew this battle would be unlike the others.

When the Muslims reached Mu'ta, they found the Byzantines had massed an army far beyond their own, their finest warriors arrayed against a force a fraction of their size. Zayd, the beloved of the Prophet ﷺ, was among the first to be killed. Jafar took up the banner. The man who had only just come home to be near the Prophet ﷺ now plunged into the heart of the enemy, swinging his sword, taking wound after wound and refusing to fall. They cut off one of his arms, and he held the banner with the other. They cut off the other, and still he would not let it touch the ground. He was killed with more than seventy wounds upon his body. Abdullah ibn Rawahah took the banner next and was martyred, until at last Khalid ibn al-Walid, newly a Muslim, gathered what remained of the army and brought them home.

In Madinah, the Prophet ﷺ waited for news with an anxious heart, as though he sensed something. When the report of Jafar's death reached him, Aisha said grief overcame his face.

He had only just gotten his cousin back, the brother who looked like him and shared his character, and now both Jafar and his adopted son Zayd were gone in a single battle. It was a wound to the whole family and to the heart of the Prophet ﷺ.

And then there is the scene that may be the most human moment in his whole life. Asma did not yet know her husband was dead. She had heard the army was returning. So, as she herself related, she got ready. She washed and clothed and perfumed all of Jafar's children, perfumed herself and put on fresh garments, prepared the dough and cooked the best meal she could, waiting for her husband to come home. Then the Prophet ﷺ came to the door, and she opened it, and she saw that his face was changed, and she was afraid to ask. He said, "Bring me Jafar's children." When they came, they crowded around him in delight, each one wanting to climb into his arms, for he was their beloved uncle. And the Prophet ﷺ gathered them up and pressed his face into their hair and breathed them in, and he could not hold back his tears. Asma asked him if he had heard anything of Jafar. He told her he had been killed.

She cried out, and he tried to gently quiet her. Then he left, and from this came a command that became sunnah, and a mercy we have largely forgotten: he told his companions to prepare food for the family of Jafar, "for there has come to them that which keeps them busy." Make food for them, give them space, carry their burden, because grief has occupied them. We so often do the opposite today, leaving the bereaved family to host and feed everyone else. The sunnah is the reverse: the community feeds the grieving, not the other way around.

And then the Prophet ﷺ spoke the words that gave Jafar his name forever. He said he had seen Jafar flying in Paradise with

the angels. From this the companions called him Dhul-Janahayn, the one with two wings. It was not a title invented by later generations. It was how his contemporaries knew him, so much so that when the Prophet ﷺ would greet Jafar's son Abdullah, he would say, "Peace be upon you, O son of the one with two wings." The man who lost both his arms holding the banner of Allah was given two wings to fly with in the Garden.

What Jafar's life asks of our faith

It is tempting to read of a man who recited Qur'an before a king until that king wept, who fought until both his arms were severed, and who now flies in Paradise, and to feel only awe, to place him so far above us that he asks nothing of our own small lives. That would be a loss. Jafar's life is not a monument to admire from a distance. It is a question put to our iman.

Look first at where most of his life went. Ten or twelve years in a foreign land, raising children far from the Prophet ﷺ, absent from the great events everyone else lived through. He could have spent those years restless and resentful, counting all that he was missing. Instead he was content with the portion Allah had given him, and carried it with patience for the sake of Allah alone. When his wife Asma was later told by Umar that the people of Madinah had preceded her in migration, she answered that yes, they had the company of the Messenger ﷺ while she and her family were far away among strangers and enemies, and all of it was for Allah and His Messenger. The Prophet ﷺ confirmed it: they had a single migration, but her family had two. The years that looked like exile were, in the sight of Allah, a double honor. This is the first thing his life asks: are you content with the place Allah has put you, even when it is not the place you would have

chosen, even when others seem to be where the blessing is? Trust that what you carry for His sake is never lost on Him.

Look next at the love of the poor. Of all the things a man who had stood in a king's court might be remembered for, Jafar is remembered as the father of the poor, the one who sat with the lowly and listened to them and gave away whatever he had down to a broken jar of honey. He was not the richest giver, and that is the point. The quality to imitate here is not wealth but the heart behind the giving, the love that draws you toward the forgotten rather than away from them. You do not need a fortune to have that heart. You need only to sit with someone the world overlooks, to listen to them as Jafar listened, to give what you have without making them feel small for receiving it. Do that this week, for the sake of Allah, where no one of importance is watching. That is the character the Prophet ﷺ called most like his own.

And look, finally, at how he fell. Both arms gone, more than seventy wounds, and he would not release the banner. This is what it looks like when a person has truly given his whole self to Allah, when there is nothing held back, no part kept in reserve for himself. We are rarely asked for our arms. We are asked for smaller things: a prayer when we are tired, an honest word when a lie is easier, a portion of our wealth when we would rather keep it, patience with a decree we did not want. Jafar's life asks whether we will hold to the banner in those small moments the way he held to it in the great one, refusing to let it touch the ground.

He gave everything, and Allah gave him wings. That is the promise hidden in his story. What the world saw as a man cut down in a hopeless battle far outnumbered, Allah recorded as a

soul rising to fly among the angels in the Garden. Nothing he gave was wasted. Nothing you give for Allah is wasted either. So take one thing from him into your ordinary days: be content with your portion as he was, love the poor as he did, and hold to your faith in the small moments without letting go. May Allah be pleased with Jafar ibn Abi Talib, the father of the poor and the one with two wings, and may He let us fly with him one day in the company of the Prophet ﷺ and the righteous who have gone before.

This chapter follows the account of Jafar ibn Abi Talib (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (19:16). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Sa'eed ibn Zayd

An Answer to His Father's Prayer

There was a man in Makkah who searched the whole earth for the truth and never reached it. His name was Zayd ibn Amr ibn Nufayl, and he is one of the loneliest figures of the age before Islam: a man who rejected the idols entirely, who would not eat what was slaughtered in their names, who turned away from the cruelty done in the shadow of those stones. When the people of his city buried their infant daughters alive in the sand outside Makkah, he went out and took the girls before the earth could close over them, and raised them, because his own clear heart told him it was the right thing to do. He traveled in search of the religion of Ibrahim and never found its final form. He died on the road back to Makkah, before a single verse of the Qur'an had been revealed.

But on that road he made a prayer. He asked Allah that if he himself had been kept from the companionship of the Prophet ﷺ who was coming, then at least his son should not be kept from it. This chapter is the story of that son, Sa'eed. It is the story of a prayer that was answered.

The house with no idols in it

Sa'eed ibn Zayd ibn Amr ibn Nufayl (may Allah be pleased with him) was born into a home unlike almost any other in Makkah: a house swept clean of every false god, in a city whose entire life

was built around those gods. While other children learned to bow to the stones at the Kaaba, Sa'eed learned, from a father who paid for it with beatings and humiliation, that there was only One worthy of worship.

You cannot measure what that does to a child. He spent his earliest years beside a man uniquely devoted to monotheism, to justice, to the truth no matter the cost, a man who stood alone against a whole society and did not break. By the time Sa'eed was a young man, his heart had been prepared, year after quiet year, for a call that had not yet come.

In his person he was striking: very tall, dark, with a great deal of hair. But the quality that would define his whole life was his humility. He was so humble that he had almost no enemies. The people of Makkah held him in high standing, not because he pushed his way to the front, but precisely because he never did: a gentleness, carried whole out of the days of ignorance, that the world tends to crush, surviving intact.

So when word reached him that a man in Makkah was calling people to worship Allah alone and to abandon the idols, Sa'eed did not need to be persuaded. It was Abu Bakr al-Siddiq who first carried the message to him, and Sa'eed accepted Islam at once, among the very first to believe. The father had searched the world and died on the road. The son simply opened the door of a house that had been ready for years.

Two fathers, two paths, one faith

There is a detail in Sa'eed's life that is almost too sharp to be invented. His wife was Fatimah bint al-Khattab, the sister of Umar ibn al-Khattab.

Consider what that means. Sa'eed's father, Zayd, had called to monotheism in Makkah before Islam even began. And Umar's father, al-Khattab, was the very man who used to beat Zayd, who made it impossible for him to stand near the Kaaba, who humiliated him for that same call. One father gave his life to proclaiming the truth of one God; the other gave his energy to silencing it. And now their children, Sa'eed and Fatimah, second cousins from the noble clan of Banu Adi, were married to one another, and entered Islam together, side by side, among the earliest of all. It is as if Allah were showing, in a single household, that no lineage of hostility is too deep for His guidance to reach through.

Fatimah's whole brother, Zayd ibn al-Khattab, had also accepted Islam, as had Sa'eed's own sister, Atikah bint Zayd. A whole web of family was quietly entering the religion in those early days, some accounts placing Sa'eed and Fatimah as the fourteenth and fifteenth to believe. Every one of them kept their faith hidden, for one simple reason. They feared Umar, who had sworn to deal with any member of his tribe who turned to Islam, believing that force was the way to stop this new religion. He did not know that the slipping away had already happened, in his own family, in the home of his own sister.

The morning of the broken door

There was a man named Khabbab ibn al-Aratt, one of the weakest and most vulnerable Muslims in Makkah, already being tortured by his master for his faith. Khabbab used to come to the house of Sa'eed and Fatimah to teach them the Qur'an: a slave who owned nothing in the world bringing the word of Allah to a couple who kept their belief like a secret flame.

One morning, into that quiet, came a banging on the door.

Umar had an unmistakable way of knocking when he was angry, and they knew at once that he was in a rage. He had set out that day to kill the Prophet ﷺ, and on his way had been turned back with a single sentence meant to divert him: why not start with your own household first, for they have followed the religion of Muhammad. Umar was the man telling everyone else to suppress their relatives, and he had just learned that his own sister and brother-in-law had, as he saw it, betrayed everything he was fighting for. He was humiliated and furious, and now his fist was on their door.

Khabbab hid. If Umar was prepared to kill the Prophet ﷺ himself, what would he do to a defenseless slave caught teaching Qur'an in this house? So Khabbab concealed himself, and Umar came in.

He demanded to know what he had heard, and told them he knew they had followed Muhammad and his religion. The argument flared, and Umar threw himself upon Sa'eed and began to beat him, exactly as his own father had once beaten Sa'eed's father for standing upon tawhid. The pattern repeated across a generation: a son of al-Khattab raining blows on a son of Zayd, over the very same truth.

When Fatimah moved to defend her husband, Umar struck her too. And then he saw it: the mark his blow had left on his sister's face, the blood. The sight of what he had done to her stopped him cold. The rage drained out of him, and he asked to see what they had been reading. Fatimah told him he would have to purify himself first. He did. And what he read was the opening of Surah Taha, the very passage that had been on their lips that morning:

Ta Ha It was not to distress you [Prophet] that We sent down the Quran to you,

The rest of that story belongs to Umar. But this is where it began: in Sa'eed's living room, with Sa'eed taking the brunt of Umar's anger, just as his own father had once taken the brunt of Umar's father's. The difference, the whole difference, is that this time the violence ended in submission to Allah. The man who came to that house to do harm left it on the road to becoming one of the greatest believers who ever lived, and would one day stand beside Sa'eed among the same ten given the glad tidings of Paradise.

There is a quieter scene from those days worth holding onto. Umar and Sa'eed once came together to the Prophet ﷺ to ask whether they could seek forgiveness for Sa'eed's father, who had spent his life calling to monotheism but died before he could reach the Messenger he was looking for. And the Prophet ﷺ told them yes, for he will be raised on the Day of Resurrection as a nation entirely on his own. The son, now a Muslim, interceding for the father who had prayed for him: the circle of that family's devotion closing before the Prophet ﷺ himself.

The soldier no one could name

After Umar accepted Islam, everything changed for Sa'eed. The brother-in-law who had been the source of his fear became a source of his protection; no one was going to trouble the family of Umar. Sa'eed was left in peace, and did not need to flee to Abyssinia as so many others did. When at last the time came to leave Makkah for good, his family migrated to Madinah alongside Umar's, the two households making the hijrah together.

From this point, his life can be described in two words: worship and battle. And over both he laid a third quality, the one that had

marked him from the start, the desire to remain unknown. He once said that even if he were given the long lifetime of Nuh, peace be upon him, nothing would be more beloved to him than to go out striving in the path of Allah, his face covered in dust, unknown to the people. This is why so little of his life survives on record, though he was one of the giants. He was a worshipper, an ascetic who wanted nothing of the world's comfort, and a fighter of extraordinary courage, all three while deliberately staying in the shadows. At the great battles of Yarmuk and Damascus he was always in the front lines, yet men who saw him often took him for another anonymous soldier. They did not know they were looking at one of the first Muslims alive.

Two things show how completely he meant it. In the matter of Badr, Sa'eed and Talhah were not present for the fighting. The Prophet ﷺ had sent them to scout the caravan of Abu Sufyan, and by the time they returned he had already marched, and they could not reach the battlefield in time. This grieved them deeply, for the veterans of Badr held a place nothing could replace. But actions are judged by their intentions. The Prophet ﷺ assigned them a share of the spoils, as he did for Uthman, and counted them among the veterans of the battle, because nothing had kept them away except his own command. Their hearts had been at Badr even when their bodies could not be, and Allah, through His Messenger, honored the intention as if it were the deed.

And Sa'eed was among those entrusted to write down the Qur'an, one of the scribes of the word of Allah, an honor that does not fall to a man by accident or by social rank. It fell to the same man who had once sat in his own living room learning Qur'an from Khabbab. His place among the early believers, his share at Badr, his writing of the revelation: none were

coincidences, but the marks of Allah's favor on a servant who never sought a single one of them for himself.

The ten, and the name he left out

Sa'eed ibn Zayd is one of the ten companions to whom the Prophet ﷺ gave the glad tidings of Paradise in this life, the group the books call the ashara mubashshara. They were all from the very first generation of believers, and the Prophet ﷺ named them together on more than one occasion.

But here is the most revealing thing about him. There is a hadith, narrated by Sa'eed himself, listing the ten whom the Prophet ﷺ promised Paradise. And when Sa'eed recounts it, he names only nine. He leaves out himself.

He could not bring himself to say his own name among them. We know he was the tenth from that very omission, and because other narrations name him plainly. But his own tongue would not do it. He had been promised the highest reward a human being can be told of while still walking the earth, and would rather risk being left off the list than be heard praising himself. That is not a pose. That is a man whose heart had genuinely turned away from the love of being seen.

That same humility shaped how he lived as Islam spread and the Muslims came into power and wealth. Sa'eed wanted no part of authority and refused governorship after governorship. When Umar, now the leader of the believers, appointed him governor of Damascus, Sa'eed went, for he had been instrumental in the battle for that city. But the palace of Caesar, with its luxury and its splendour, made him deeply uncomfortable. This was not what he had signed up for; he had never wanted palaces or prominence over people. So he wrote to Umar, asking to be

relieved and a better man put in charge, asking only to return to the life he loved: an unknown soldier on the path of Allah, for whatever time he had left.

He was an introvert who chose a quiet life and was given a long one, outliving almost all of the ten promised Paradise. There is a hadith, narrated by Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, that seems to describe Sa'eed exactly: that Allah loves the servant who is pious, self-sufficient, and hidden, obscure from the public eye. Sa'eed lived it as though it had been written about him.

The cry of the wronged

He shared something else with Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas: his supplications were answered. There is a narration about this, recorded in Sahih Muslim, that is not pleasant but is deeply important. It happened years after the Prophet ﷺ had passed away, under the rule of Marwan. Sa'eed had a neighbour, a woman, who went to the governor and accused him of seizing part of her land. Humble people are often taken advantage of, and here was Sa'eed, a man not known to raise his voice in private even as he fought like a lion in battle, being publicly accused of theft by a neighbour who had decided his gentleness was weakness.

What stung Sa'eed was not the loss of property. It was the accusation itself, the charge that he, of all people, would steal. He said: do you think I would take someone's land, when I am the one who heard the Prophet ﷺ say that whoever takes a hand's span of land without right will have it hung around his neck, seven earths deep, on the Day of Resurrection? I heard that warning with my own ears, he was saying; I was among the first to believe and gave my life to this religion. Do you imagine I would throw all of that away for a strip of someone's soil?

And then he did what only a man certain of his Lord would do. He said: fine, take it, and surrendered the land. But he raised his hands against the woman: O Allah, if she has lied, then take away her sight, and make this very land her grave.

The Prophet ﷺ had taught the believers to fear the supplication of the oppressed, for there is no veil between that cry and Allah, even when the one crying out is a disbeliever. If the cry of any wronged soul reaches Allah unobstructed, imagine the cry of a companion, one of the ten given glad tidings of Paradise, when he calls out that he has been wronged. The narrator tells us what followed. The woman lost her sight, and one day, walking on the very land she had claimed and in truth stolen, she fell into a well on that property and died.

It is a hard story, and it is meant to be. Forgiveness is the norm of our religion, and it is beautiful. But justice is also part of it, the foundation on which forgiveness can stand, and a person who is wronged has a real right, including the right to call upon Allah. Sa'eed would not fight over a handful of dirt, but he knew the door to his Lord was open, and he knocked on it, and his Lord answered.

A quiet end, and a beautiful scent

When the great tribulations, the fitnah, began to tear through the ummah, when Muslims drew their swords against one another, Sa'eed wanted nothing to do with it. He had not embraced Islam to fight his own brothers and sisters. So he withdrew, moving out of Madinah into a valley to spend his last years in worship and in peace. He lived a long, quiet life and died around fifty years after the hijrah, well into his seventies.

The manner of his passing was as gentle as the life. One morning he prayed the dawn prayer, Salat al-Fajr, then went home, lay down, spoke the shahadah, and died. There was nothing dramatic in it, no battlefield, no crowd, only a man who had loved obscurity slipping quietly out of the world with the testimony of faith on his tongue. His body was carried back to Madinah, washed and prayed over by Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas and Abdullah ibn Umar, and buried in al-Baqi. And when they came to apply musk to his body, as is the sunnah, they found a beautiful fragrance already rising from him before they had touched it with any scent at all.

There is one last sign of the man. When Umar, near the end of his life, appointed a small council to choose the next leader of the Muslims, every man he named was from the ten promised Paradise, except for Sa'eed, his own brother-in-law, whom he left off. Some say Umar did it to keep his own family out of the succession; others say it was Sa'eed himself who wanted no part of it. Either way, the man who never sought a position was, once more, left in the peace he had always preferred.

What Sa'eed's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read this life and admire it from a distance, to file Sa'eed away as a brave and modest man and move on. That would be to miss what his life is actually asking of us. It is a question put directly to our own iman.

Begin with the prayer of his father. Zayd died on a lonely road, and his single recorded supplication was for his son, and Allah answered it. So here is the first thing his life asks: do you believe Allah hears? Do you believe that a sincere prayer, made for someone you love in a moment when you can see no way for it to be answered, is heard and kept and one day fulfilled, even after

you are gone? Then make the du'a, for your children, for your parents, for the people you may never live to see guided. Zayd never met the Messenger he sought, but his son carried that Messenger's revelation in his own hand. Nothing offered sincerely to Allah is wasted, not even a dying man's prayer on an empty road.

Then take the quality that defined Sa'eed: his love of obscurity. He fought in the front lines and let men mistake him for no one; he was promised Paradise and could not bring himself to say his own name. This is the rarest and most healing thing for a heart in our time, when so much of life is arranged around being seen. Sincerity, *ikhlas*, is to do the deed for Allah alone and to be content that He has seen it, even when no one else ever will. Ask yourself honestly how much of what you do is shaped by the hope that people will notice. Then do one good thing this week the way Sa'eed did everything: in secret, for Allah, with no audience but your Lord.

And learn from how he met being wronged. He gave up the disputed land without a fight, because his treasure was never in the soil; but he knew he was not powerless, because the door to Allah stood open. When people take from you, when your gentleness is mistaken for weakness, you are not asked to become hard or bitter. You are asked to hold loosely to the world the way Sa'eed did, to hold tightly to your Lord, and to know that the cry of the wronged reaches Him with no veil in between.

So carry one thing of his into your own days. Pray for someone you may never see answered. Do one good deed that no human being will ever know about. Hold this world loosely enough that losing a piece of it cannot shake your peace. That is how the answer to a father's prayer lived: hidden, sincere, content, his

name forgotten and his deeds rising like that fragrance from his body, accepted by the only One whose acceptance he ever wanted. May Allah be pleased with Sa'eed ibn Zayd, and with his father whose prayer reached across his own death to find him, and may He grant us a share of that hidden sincerity, and gather us with the company of those given the glad tidings of Paradise.

This chapter follows the account of Sa'eed ibn Zayd (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (20:1-2). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abu Dharr al-Ghifari

The Truthful Loner

There is a quiet beauty in the way some of the very first Muslims, those who came to faith in the same early years, were also gathered around one another at the hour of their deaths. Abu Dharr al-Ghifari (may Allah be pleased with him) is one of those men. He lived most of his life apart from the crowd, by choice and by nature, and yet his story closes with a companion he had known since the beginning kneeling in the dust to kiss his forehead. He lived alone, he died alone, and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ promised that he would be raised alone. To understand why that was praise and not pity, you have to begin with the man before Islam reached him.

A serious man from a tribe of robbers

His name was Jundub ibn Junada, though history remembers him almost entirely by his nickname, Abu Dharr. He was a black Arab, and he belonged to Ghifar, a tribe of bandits and highway robbers who dwelt on the outskirts to the south of Madinah. When a caravan passed through their territory the merchants held their breath. Everyone feared Ghifar.

And yet Abu Dharr was not made in the mould of his people. The Prophet ﷺ taught that the best of men in the days of ignorance remain the best of them in Islam, that good qualities are not erased by faith but only polished by it, and Abu Dharr is living

proof of that. He took no part in the robbery and violence that made his tribe feared. He was a serious young man, detached from the world at an age when most men are reaching for it, keeping to himself with few friends, perhaps none. That solitude was woven into him long before it ever became a sign upon him.

Something else set him apart. Even as a young shepherd in the Waddan desert, he had already turned away from the idols; his heart leaned, on its own, toward the worship of one God. He was among the weak and the marginalized, the kind the proud men of Quraysh never noticed, and that too fit a pattern: the first to enter Islam were so often the young, the weak, the overlooked, those quietly disillusioned with the religion of their fathers. When the call to pure monotheism reached such a heart, it did not have to break down any walls. The walls were already gone.

The stranger by the Kaaba

Word reached the desert that a man had risen in Makkah claiming to be a prophet. Abu Dharr did not let it pass. He sent his brother, Anis, to learn what he could, and Anis returned with this: I saw a man of noble character, who enjoins what is good and forbids what is evil. It is exactly what the Prophet ﷺ said of his own mission, that he was sent only to perfect good character. But Abu Dharr was not easily satisfied. Is that all you have, he asked. That is all, said his brother. That is not enough for me, Abu Dharr answered, and he took his water skin and his staff and set out for Makkah himself.

The most detailed account of what followed is narrated in Sahih al-Bukhari by Abdullah ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with them both), who gathered it from the aging companions long after Abu Dharr became Muslim. He came to Makkah knowing no one, so he went to the Haram, drank from the well of Zamzam,

and simply waited. One evening Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him), still a young man, noticed this stranger and took him in for the night, asking nothing. He did the same the next night, and still neither man revealed anything. Only on the third day did Ali ask his business, and Abu Dharr made a quiet bargain: if you will keep my secret, I will tell you. So he confided that he had come to find the man said to claim prophethood. Ali smiled. You have been guided to the truth, he said. I am on my way to him right now. Come with me.

Of all the people in Makkah who might have found this lone stranger, it was Ali, the one who could lead him straight to the Prophet ﷺ rather than to its enemies. This was Allah guiding Abu Dharr, step by hidden step. Ali, cautious in dangerous times, had him follow at a distance, ready to break off if anyone grew suspicious, until they came to the Prophet ﷺ.

And here two firsts happened at once. Abu Dharr entered and said, Assalamu alaikum ya Rasulullah, peace be upon you, O Messenger of Allah. And the Prophet ﷺ replied, and upon you be the peace of Allah, His mercy and His blessings. But this was no small thing: Abu Dharr was the very first person to greet the Prophet ﷺ with the salam of Islam, and so the first to be answered with it. The greeting that now passes a thousand times a day between believers carries within it this quiet beginning. Then he asked, present Islam to me. The Prophet ﷺ laid it before him, and Abu Dharr accepted right there, without a moment's thought. The truth he had carried in his heart all those years in the desert simply recognized itself.

The Prophet ﷺ, mindful of the danger, advised him to conceal his affair, return to his people, and come back when he heard that the believers had prevailed. These were the first and most fragile

days, around the time of the conversion of Sad ibn Abi Waqqas (may Allah be pleased with them all), when caution was wisdom.

But Abu Dharr was a man without fear. By the One who sent you with the truth, he said, I will announce my Islam openly among them. And he walked out to the Kaaba, into the heart of Quraysh, and called out for all to hear: O people of Quraysh, I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and that Muhammad is His servant and messenger.

They fell on him at once, beat him, trampled him, nearly killed him. And then a man threw himself over his body to shield him: al-Abbas, the Prophet's uncle. He did not argue religion with them; he spoke their language: you would kill a man from Ghifar, when your caravans pass through the land of Ghifar? The reputation of his bandit tribe now saved his life, and the crowd let him go. The next morning he did exactly the same thing, and again they beat him, and again al-Abbas shielded him.

When Abu Dharr returned to the Prophet ﷺ in that state, the Prophet ﷺ asked, did I not tell you to keep your Islam secret? Abu Dharr answered, O Messenger of Allah, it was a need within me, and I fulfilled it. So the Prophet ﷺ sent him home with a mission: go back to your people and call them to Allah. Perhaps Allah will benefit them through you and reward you through them. And when you hear that I have come into the open, then return.

He brought his people as an army of believers

Abu Dharr went home. His brother Anis, hearing what had happened, said, I feel the same, and accepted Islam at once. Their mother said, these are simple words and I see no reason to refuse them, and she accepted too. These were simple people with no proud lineage to defend; their hearts were already

inclined to the worship of one God, and faith only had to be spoken aloud for their nature to answer it. Then Abu Dharr turned to the whole tribe of Ghifar, and they came in such numbers that he began to lead them in prayer, in the form it took before the five daily prayers were made obligatory. The feared tribe of robbers was becoming a tribe of worshippers, and all the while the Prophet ﷺ was praying for them: O Allah, guide Ghifar and bring them to me.

When the Prophet ﷺ migrated to Madinah, the road finally opened, and Abu Dharr did not come alone. He brought Ghifar, and with them another tribe, Aslam, men and women and children, so many that as they approached, the people of Madinah thought an army was coming to attack. And it was an army, of a kind. Abu Dharr stood before the Prophet ﷺ and said, O Messenger of Allah, I have brought you my people as Muslims. Imagine the Prophet's joy: his prayer answered before his eyes, a tribe of bandits delivered whole into the faith.

There is a lesson here that should never leave us. Do not withhold this message from anyone, and never decide that a person or a hardened group is beyond it. You do not know whose heart Allah will open, or when. The most feared tribe in Arabia walked into Islam together; no one is unworthy of the call.

The slip, and the mercy that followed

Abu Dharr was not a finished man, and one famous incident shows him still carrying something of his old days, and shows how a believer rises after a fall.

On the road, he quarreled with a man, reported in some narrations to have been Bilal (may Allah be pleased with him), though that is not certain. In the heat of it, Abu Dharr insulted him

by his mother, calling him the son of a black woman. Abu Dharr was himself a black Arab, so the sting was not about color in the way it might first sound; it was an insult drawn from the ignorance of the old days, a wounding of a man through his lineage. When it reached the Prophet ﷺ, he asked, did you insult him by his mother? And then he said the words that cut Abu Dharr to the heart: you are a man in whom there is still something of the days of ignorance. Abu Dharr had not had the long mentorship of the early Makkan years that refined so many others. He had come from the desert, and it showed.

The admonition devastated him, and his repentance was complete. He humbled himself entirely, willing to bear any consequence, and he carried the lesson for the rest of his life. Long after, when a man remarked that Abu Dharr's servant, a freed man under his care, was dressed exactly like him and fed the same food, Abu Dharr recalled what the Prophet ﷺ had taught: they are your brothers, placed under your hand by Allah, so feed them from what you eat and clothe them from what you wear. He became known for freeing those who were enslaved. And the hadith that there is no virtue of a white man over a black man, nor a black over a white, except by taqwa, comes to us narrated by Abu Dharr.

And here is the mercy. That harsh moment did not end him. The Prophet ﷺ said of this same man that the earth has never carried, nor the sky shaded, anyone more truthful than Abu Dharr. The man told plainly that he still bore traits of ignorance was also named the most truthful soul the earth ever carried. The fall was not the end of the story; it was a station on the way up.

His truthfulness was the key to him: he held himself to the truth above all and never feared its consequences. That same

sternness meant the Prophet ﷺ once advised him, out of love, not to seek leadership. You are weak, he told him, and authority is a trust, and on the Day of Resurrection it will be regret for whoever does not fulfill its right; I love for you what I love for myself. It was not a rebuke but tenderness.

How do I keep up?

Once he was settled, Abu Dharr became something rare: a man whose endless questions to the Prophet ﷺ have become part of the religion we hold today, much of it hope handed to people like us who came long after. Through him we learn that two qualities are light on the back but heavy on the scale, good character and long silence. When he asked about a man who loves a people but cannot match their deeds, the Prophet ﷺ answered, you will be with those you love; overjoyed, Abu Dharr said, I love Allah and His Messenger, and the Prophet ﷺ repeated it. And when some companions complained that the wealthy had run off with all the reward through their charity, it was in part Abu Dharr who carried the question, and the Prophet ﷺ gave him the remedy that costs nothing: to say SubhanAllah, Alhamdulillah, and Allahu akbar thirty-three times each after every prayer. The poor were not shut out of nearness to Allah; the door was open and free.

Notice the shape of every one of these questions. How do I keep up? How do I draw nearer? Abu Dharr, the most truthful man the earth had carried, never imagined himself among the elite of the righteous. His honesty turned inward, saw only his own shortfall, and kept him reaching.

He walks alone, he dies alone

At Tabuk, the Prophet ﷺ said the words that would shape the rest of Abu Dharr's life and quietly foretell his death. It was a

brutal expedition, deep into the heat of high summer, the journey that exposed the hypocrites of Madinah. As the march wore on, men fell behind. Each time one dropped away, the Prophet ﷺ would say, leave him; if there is any good in him, Allah will bring him back to you, and if not, Allah has relieved you of him. So the army pressed forward, growing smaller.

Then they noticed Abu Dharr was missing. This was no hypocrite, no maker of excuses; this was the man who had taken beatings at the Kaaba for the sake of Allah. His camel, they guessed, had slowed, for even the camels were collapsing in that heat. And so it had: the animal grew weak with thirst and fatigue and began to stumble, until at last Abu Dharr climbed down, took his belongings on his own back, abandoned it, and ran on foot to catch the Prophet ﷺ and the believers.

The next day the army saw a lone figure in the distance, a man walking with a cloud of dust rising behind him. And the Prophet ﷺ said, let it be Abu Dharr. When the companions reached him and saw who it was, they called out, O Messenger of Allah, it is Abu Dharr. The Prophet ﷺ was filled with joy, and then he said the words: may Allah have mercy on Abu Dharr. He walks alone, he dies alone, and he will be resurrected alone. It was a prophecy, and it was praise. Abu Dharr had always been the one apart, and so he would remain.

The years turned. The Prophet ﷺ passed away. Abu Dharr lived into the time of Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him) and watched Islam pour across the world and great wealth pour into the ummah. And Abu Dharr, the ascetic who had carried his whole life in a water skin and a staff, could not make peace with it. He had known the hard, lean days beside the Prophet ﷺ, and the pursuit of riches troubled him to his core. At last he asked

Uthman for permission to withdraw to a place called al-Rabadhah, on the road from Madinah toward Iraq. Uthman granted it, and Abu Dharr went out into the emptiness with his wife and a single young boy, and lived where no one else lived, seen only by travelers passing between the two cities.

A man passed his bare house once and asked where his possessions were. Abu Dharr answered, we have a house in the Hereafter, and we send the best of our possessions ahead to it. His asceticism was not poverty of spirit but the opposite: he had simply decided where his treasure belonged, and it was not here.

And there, in that emptiness, death came for him. As the agony settled on him, his wife began to weep, for there was no one to wash him and no one to pray over a great companion of the Prophet ﷺ. But Abu Dharr comforted her. The Prophet ﷺ once told a group of us, he said, that a band of believers would be present at the death of one of us, and the truthful one would never tell me anything but the truth. So do not grieve. Then he lay down and died, alone in the desert, as had been foretold. His wife and the boy washed him and wrapped him in his shroud, and she laid his body upon the road and sat beside it, waiting.

And they came. Along that very road a group of travelers appeared, led by none other than Abdullah ibn Masud (may Allah be pleased with him), with his students. The two men who had entered Islam together in those first fragile days were brought together one final time by Allah. Ibn Masud, who had been at Tabuk and surely remembered the prophecy, saw the shrouded body laid out in the wilderness, and he understood. He wept, and bent down and kissed Abu Dharr's forehead, and repeated the words of the Prophet ﷺ over his friend: may Allah have mercy on you, O Abu Dharr. You lived alone, you died alone, and you will be

raised alone. Then he and his students prayed the janazah over him.

No film could arrange a scene so perfectly. Two companions who began together took utterly different roads, one into the heart of the people, the other into chosen solitude, and yet they arrived at the same point at the same hour, by the decree of the One who had guided them both. Abu Dharr's aloneness was never abandonment; it was a station kept for him by his Lord.

What Abu Dharr's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like Abu Dharr's and file it away as the story of a colorful, difficult man, admirable from a safe distance. That would be a loss. His life is a question pressed against our own iman.

The quality to take from him first is truthfulness, the *sidq* that made the Prophet ﷺ call him the most truthful soul the earth had carried. But notice where Abu Dharr aimed his honesty: not outward, as a weapon against other people, but inward, at himself. Every question he asked was really a confession that he feared he was falling short and needed to draw nearer. Most of us run the opposite way, gentle with our own faults and exacting with everyone else's. Abu Dharr reversed it. Ask yourself today where your hardness is pointed. The believer who tells himself the truth about himself, who refuses to be comforted by his own excuses, is the one who keeps climbing, because he never decides he has arrived. That restlessness is the proof of a sincere heart that wants Allah more than its own ease.

His life also asks whether your treasure is truly with Allah, or only said to be. Abu Dharr meant it: he sent his possessions ahead to the Hereafter and kept almost nothing here, and when wealth

flooded the ummah he would not let his heart soften toward it. You do not have to walk into a desert to learn from him. But you can ask, plainly, where your security actually rests: in your savings, your standing, the things you are quietly certain you could not live without, or in your Lord? Loosen your grip on one thing this week for the sake of Allah, give it away where no one will know, and let it teach your heart that what we send ahead is the only wealth that was ever really ours.

And then there is the mercy at the center of his story, which should lift anyone who has ever fallen. The man told to his face that he still carried the traits of ignorance was also named the most truthful man beneath the sky. The correction did not cancel him; his sincere repentance carried him from that low moment to the highest praise. If you carry some old fault you fear has marked you for good, hear this: with Allah, the slip is not the end. The honest return is the turning point. Abu Dharr rose. So can you.

Take one thing from him into the ordinary days you actually live. Tell yourself the truth about one of your own faults, without excuse, and turn from it for the sake of Allah. Hold your wealth and comfort a little more loosely, knowing where your real home is. And when you are corrected, let it bend you toward repentance, not despair. The door to such sincerity is still open to anyone who walks through it without fear. May Allah be pleased with Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, make us truthful with our own souls as he was with his, and gather us with him and his companion in the company of the Prophet ﷺ.

This chapter follows the account of Abu Dharr al-Ghifari (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). No Qur'an verse is quoted: the lecture refers to the Qur'an's address

to the hypocrites at Tabuk without citing a specific verse. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abdullah ibn Mas'ud

The Voice That Carried the Qur'an

There was a boy on the outskirts of Makkah whom the city would not have noticed if it had tried. He owned nothing. He belonged to no tribe that mattered there. He spent his days behind other men's sheep, on land that was not his, working for one of the cruelest men in the city. If you had asked the great names of Quraysh to point him out, they could not have done it, and most would not have wanted to. Yet this is the boy whose voice would be the first to lift the Qur'an into the open air in front of the Kaaba, and whose recitation the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would one day name as the closest thing on earth to the way the words first came down from heaven. His name was Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (may Allah be pleased with him), and his life is a long answer to a single question: what does Allah actually weigh, when He weighs a human being?

A boy with no place in the city

He was from the tribe of Hudhayl, a people of the open country, Bedouin by reputation, with no standing inside Makkah. His father, Mas'ud, had come into the city to do the work the city did not want to do for itself: tending livestock, taking on the lower tasks, living under the protection of a clan that was not his own. He had tied himself by allegiance to Banu Zuhra, and his son inherited that place exactly. To be a man of allegiance in Makkah was to live at the edge of everything. You did not enter the

politics of the powerful, you did not sit among the elite, you kept your head down and you worked.

So Abdullah grew up among the weak of that society, the ones the histories call the du'afa, the marginalized, the unprotected. He took up his father's trade and shepherded sheep. By the time the Prophet ﷺ began to call people to Islam, this teenager was tending the flock of Uqba ibn Abi Mu'ayt, one of the most vicious enemies the message would ever have, the very man who would later throw the entrails of a slaughtered camel onto the back of the Prophet ﷺ while he prayed. That detail matters. The boy who would help finish the tyrants of Makkah began his life serving them.

His body, too, set him apart. He was unusually short and extremely thin, so slight that they said when people were seated, Abdullah standing was no taller than the men around him sitting, and when people stood, he could vanish among them entirely. He had little facial hair and dark skin, and he looked, by every account, like one of the people of the desert. A man named Ibn Sabrah, one of his later students in Kufa, described going out with him at Hajj and seeing him with his two braids, chanting the talbiyah, looking for all the world like a Bedouin, until a crowd gathered to correct him, certain this small dark stranger had simply gotten the rituals wrong. They had no idea who he was. This is what the world saw when it looked at Abdullah ibn Mas'ud. It is worth holding onto, because heaven saw something else entirely.

The sheep that gave no milk

His entry into Islam did not come through Abu Bakr's gentle invitations, the way it came for so many others. It came on the

open land, while he was minding the flock, and it began with a refusal to lie.

He told the story himself. One day two travelers approached him, a man and his companion. The first asked whether the boy had any goats with milk they could drink from, for they were on a journey. Abdullah, not knowing who they were, gave an answer that already revealed the kind of person he was. He said he did not own the sheep; he was only entrusted with them, and he could not give away their milk, because that would be a betrayal of the trust placed in him by his master. The man did not argue. He simply asked for a sheep that had no milk in it at all. Abdullah brought him one.

Then the man, who was the Prophet ﷺ, placed his hand on the animal's udder, said "Bismillah," and the dry sheep filled with milk. He drank, and gave his companion, Abu Bakr, to drink, and gave the boy to drink, all from an animal that should have had nothing to give, so that no trust was broken and no one went without. When he was finished, the sheep returned to exactly as it had been before, dry. Abdullah, watching, asked the only thing a heart like his could ask. He did not ask for wealth or a sign for himself. He said, "Uncle, teach me these words you said." The Prophet ﷺ wiped his hand across the boy's chest, smiled at him, and told him he was an intelligent young man, a boy who had been given understanding.

That was enough to set him searching. As soon as the travelers left, he went and asked the people of Makkah who they were, found his way to the truth of it, and came back to declare that there is no god but Allah and that this man was the Messenger of Allah. He is remembered as the sixth person ever to enter Islam, nicknamed for a time the sixth of Islam, sudus al-Islam, when the

believers on the earth could be counted on the fingers of two hands. A shepherd boy, one-sixth of a faith that would one day reach every corner of the world.

The keeper of the sandals

What followed was a closeness that other companions would come to envy in the best possible way. The Prophet ﷺ drew this boy near and kept him near. He became the one who carried the Prophet's sandals, tucking them under his arm so he could walk beside him. He carried the Prophet's water for his ablution when they traveled, guarded his pillow, kept his siwak, woke him from sleep, and shielded him when he needed privacy. He attended to the Prophet ﷺ so constantly, and stayed with him so long each day, that when Abu Musa al-Ash'ari arrived from Yemen with his brother, the two of them assumed for a time that Abdullah and his mother were members of the Prophet's own household. They simply could not imagine that a man so close was not family.

He was more than a servant. He was a confidant. The Prophet ﷺ gave him a standing permission that few ever received: the veil was lifted for him, he could come close and hear whatever was said, until and unless he was told that something was private. The default, for Abdullah, was access. Years later, when people asked Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman, the companion famous for keeping the Prophet's deepest secrets, to name the one whose guidance and character and conduct came nearest to the Prophet ﷺ so they could learn from him, Hudhayfah named Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, and said that he would even go into the Prophet's house when the rest of them stayed outside. The most upright of the companions, the ones Hudhayfah called the guarded, those Allah protected from hypocrisy and from going

astray, knew this small man to be among the very closest of them all to Allah.

The first voice at the Kaaba

Then came the day that would define him. The early believers were talking among themselves about something no one had yet dared to do: recite the Qur'an aloud, in the open, in front of the Kaaba, where the idols stood and the people of Makkah went about their trade. They began suggesting who might do it, and naturally the names were the protected ones, men like Uthman ibn Affan, men of wealth and noble standing whose tribes would shield them from being killed for it.

The last name that fit such a description was Abdullah ibn Mas'ud. He had no tribe to defend him. He had no trade partner who would step in to protect him. He did not have the body to absorb the beating that was certain to come. He was, in every worldly calculation, the worst possible choice, the one Quraysh themselves would later refuse even to sit in the same gathering with. And he is the one who stood up and said he would do it, and that Allah Himself would protect him. The companions tried to talk him out of it. He insisted.

So picture it. A city full of idols, a people who had never once heard these words spoken in public, and a small dark shepherd walking out to the front of the Kaaba and beginning, from his heart, to recite:

It is the Lord of Mercy who taught the Quran. He created man and taught him to communicate.

QUR'AN 55:1-4

He recited Surah Ar-Rahman, one of the earliest revealed surahs, the surah of mercy, in the face of a people who knew nothing of mercy toward him. At first they puzzled over it, wondering if it was poetry, and then someone understood: these were the words of Muhammad, the words he claimed came down from above seven heavens. They fell on him together. They beat him until he was unconscious, stamping on him so brutally that his collarbones were said to be crushed. The believers pulled his limp body out and carried him away, and treated him, certain at first he might be dead.

When he came to and they asked him why he had done it, when they had warned him exactly what would happen, his answer is one of the great sentences of that early time. He said the enemies of Allah had never seemed smaller or more insignificant in his sight than they did at that moment. He had no regard for them whatsoever. And then he said he wanted to go back the next day and do it again, and let them do to him whatever they would, even if his soul left his body. They told him it was enough. He had already made them hear the very thing they could not bear to hear.

The recitation the Prophet wept to hear

That love for the Qur'an was not a single brave act. It was the whole shape of his life. The Prophet ﷺ said that whoever wished to hear the Qur'an fresh, the way it was revealed, should listen to the recitation of Ibn Mas'ud. When he named the people from whom the Qur'an should be learned, he named Abdullah first. And Abdullah himself said that he took seventy surahs directly from the mouth of the Prophet ﷺ, that he was there, that he received them fresh, from the one upon whom Surah al-Baqarah was revealed. So much of the Qur'an as it reaches us today

passed through this man and his students, who heard it from him, who heard it from the Prophet ﷺ, and then taught it on and on until it arrived in our hands.

There is one scene that says more than any title. The Prophet ﷺ once asked Abdullah to recite the Qur'an to him. Abdullah was stunned. "Shall I recite it to you," he asked, "when it was revealed to you?" And the Prophet ﷺ said that he loved to hear it from someone other than himself. So Abdullah sat and recited Surah an-Nisa, until he reached the verse that asks how it will be when a witness is brought from every nation, and the Prophet ﷺ is brought as a witness against all of them. There the Prophet ﷺ told him to stop. Abdullah looked up, and saw the eyes of the Prophet ﷺ overflowing, the tears streaming down at the weight of being a witness over the nations on the Day of Judgment. The shepherd boy's voice, reciting to the Messenger of Allah, had brought him to tears.

It was for the likes of Abdullah, and the other believers Quraysh held in contempt, that Allah comforted His Prophet and commanded him not to turn away from them:

Content yourself with those who pray to their Lord morning and evening, seeking His approval, and do not let your eyes turn away from them out of desire for the attractions of this worldly life.

QUR'AN 18:28

The men of Makkah did not want to share a room with Abdullah ibn Mas'ud. Allah told His Prophet to keep his heart with him, and to seek nothing in this world above his company.

Legs heavier than a mountain

Once, the people who mocked him from outside were joined, for a single careless moment, by some who should have known better. Abdullah was up in an arak tree, gathering the wood that siwak is cut from, when the wind blew his garment and exposed his legs, which were as thin and small as the rest of him. Some of the companions laughed. The Prophet ﷺ saw it, and he saw the hurt on Abdullah's face, and he did not let it pass the way a lesser man might have let it pass among friends. He asked them why they were laughing. They admitted it was at the thinness of his legs. And the Prophet ﷺ swore by Allah that those two legs would be heavier on the scales on the Day of Judgment than the mountain of Uhud.

Think of the size of Uhud, and then think of the small man in the tree. This is the same Prophet ﷺ who taught that a person can come on the Day of Judgment huge in body, mighty in stature, and not weigh, in the sight of Allah, the wing of a mosquito. Here was the exact reverse, made flesh: a man the world could barely see, whose legs alone outweighed a mountain because of what was in his heart. And then, at Badr, it was this same small man who climbed onto the chest of Abu Jahl, the towering tyrant of Makkah, the pharaoh of this nation, after he had fallen. Abu Jahl, even then, sneered down at him: a hard climb you have made, little shepherd of sheep. He asked who had won. Abdullah told him the victory belonged to Allah and His Messenger, and finished him. The Prophet ﷺ gave him Abu Jahl's sword. The man the city weighed as nothing had brought down the man it weighed as everything.

His standing with Allah showed even in his private words. The Prophet ﷺ once heard him making du'a in the night and stopped to listen, and Abu Bakr and Umar stopped with him, and the Prophet ﷺ said, "Ask, and you will be given." Abdullah was

asking for faith that would never fade, for blessings that would never be taken away, and for the companionship of the Prophet ﷺ in the highest level of Paradise. The Prophet ﷺ said, "Amin."

A well the ummah still drinks from

He lived a long life in the service of that faith. He made the migration to Abyssinia and then to Madinah. He was at Badr and at the pledge of Ridwan and at Uhud, where he narrated the Prophet's words as the blood ran down his blessed face: "O Allah, forgive my people, for they do not know." He learned the tashahhud from the Prophet ﷺ with his hand held inside the Prophet's palms, the same way, he said, that he was taught a surah of the Qur'an. Under Umar, who loved him so dearly that he would throw something at anyone who disrespected him, he was sent to teach and govern in Kufa. Umar said he was preferring the people of Kufa over himself by sending them a man he could hardly bear to live without, and from that single decision the great schools of Qur'an and fiqh of Kufa would later flow.

There is a story that catches him whole. A group of travelers passed through Madinah late one night, speaking, when Umar questioned them, in the very phrases of the Qur'an. Umar said these people have a scholar among them, and began testing them. Which verse is greatest? Ayat al-Kursi. Which is most decisive in justice? The verse commanding justice and good and giving to relatives. Which is most comprehensive? They answered with the verse:

*whoever has done an atom's-weight of good will see it, but
whoever has done an atom's-weight of evil will see that.*

QUR'AN 99:7-8

Which gives the greatest hope? The verse telling those who have wronged themselves not to despair of the mercy of Allah. At last Umar asked: is Abdullah ibn Mas'ud among you? They said yes, by Allah. And Umar, overjoyed, went and embraced him, and sat at his feet for hours, drinking from the man he called a vessel filled to the brim with knowledge.

He died in the time of Uthman, before the great trials he had foretold could reach him, spared from the fitna. He asked that az-Zubayr, his brother from the days of migration, pray over him. When he was gone, Abu Musa al-Ash'ari was asked whether anyone had been left behind to equal him in knowledge, and he said no, because Abdullah had been present with the Prophet ﷺ when the rest of them were absent, and had witnessed what no one else witnessed. The shepherd with no place in the city had become one of the greatest teachers this ummah has ever had, and we are still drinking from his well today, in ways we mostly never stop to notice.

What this life asks of our faith

It is easy to read about Abdullah ibn Mas'ud and feel admiration for his courage, and then close the book unchanged. But his life is not asking for our admiration. It is asking a harder thing. It is asking whether we believe what he believed about Allah.

He believed that Allah does not weigh what people weigh. The city saw a small dark shepherd of no account, and Allah saw a man whose thin legs would outweigh a mountain on the Day of Judgment. We live surrounded by other people's scales: their measures of success, of importance, of who is worth listening to and who can be overlooked. His life asks you to stop carrying those scales in your own heart. The question is not whether the world sees you. The question is what Allah sees when He looks

past your appearance and your standing, straight into your heart, because that is the only weighing that will ever count. Tend that. Let the rest go.

He believed Allah would protect him, and so he stepped forward when no one else would. When the believers looked for someone safe to recite at the Kaaba, he had every worldly reason to stay silent, and he volunteered, saying simply that Allah would protect him. He was beaten unconscious, and his first thought on waking was to go back and do it again. That is what trust in Allah looks like when it is real: not a feeling, but a willingness to do the thing He loves even when it costs you, because you are sure your affair is finally in His hands and not theirs. Most of us wait until obedience is safe and convenient. He did not wait. Ask yourself what small act of obedience you have been postponing until it feels safe, and whether your trust in Allah is large enough to do it now.

And he loved the Qur'an the way you love a person. He did not treat it as information. He received it fresh from the mouth of the Prophet ﷺ, recited it until the Messenger of Allah wept, and carried it everywhere he went, and his love for it became the love that defined his whole life. He used to say that whoever loves the Qur'an loves Allah and His Messenger. That is the most concrete thing his life can hand you today, and it is within reach of anyone, no tribe or strength or status required. Open the Book. Read it slowly, as if it were just revealed and you were the one receiving it. Let a verse stop you the way it stopped the Prophet ﷺ. A heart that draws near to the words of Allah is drawing near to Allah Himself, and that nearness is offered to the shepherd and the king alike.

So take one thing from this small, mighty man into your ordinary day. Do one act of obedience you have been afraid to do, trusting that Allah will take care of what follows. Sit with the Qur'an as though it were spoken to you alone. And stop weighing yourself, and others, on the scales of a world that could not even see Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, when Allah had made him heavier than Uhud. May Allah be pleased with him, gather us with him in the company he asked for in the highest part of Paradise, and let us love the Qur'an, and love Allah, the way he did.

This chapter follows the account of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (55:1-4, 18:28, 99:7-8). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Saad ibn Abi Waqqas

The Archer Whose Prayers Were Answered

There was a young man in Makkah who made bows and arrows for a living, and who could draw a bow better than almost anyone in the city. He was barely out of his teens, fatherless, living with his mother, known for a sharp eye and a steady hand. His name was Saad ibn Abi Waqqas (may Allah be pleased with him), and one night, before he had ever heard the call to Islam, he dreamed that he was standing in a wide plain of total darkness, unable to see anything at all, until a full moon rose and he began to follow it. In the dream he glimpsed three men who had reached the light ahead of him. He would soon learn their names, and learn that the light was real.

This is the story of a man whose aim never missed, whose prayers were answered by Allah, and who chose, at the height of his power, to want almost nothing from this world at all.

The maternal uncle of the Prophet

Saad was from Banu Zuhra, a tribe tied by blood to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself. The Prophet's mother was Aminah bint Wahb, and Saad's grandfather, Wuhayb, was the brother of Wahb, Aminah's father. That made Saad a maternal uncle of the Prophet ﷺ in the broad Arab sense, and the Prophet ﷺ would say it openly. Looking at Saad he would say, "This is my maternal

uncle. Let one of you show me his uncle," as if to ask, who among you can claim an uncle like this?

The title can mislead, so it is worth being clear. Saad was no elderly relative. He was at least twenty years younger than the Prophet ﷺ, a teenager when revelation first came. His kunya was Abu Ishaq, a name that would echo down the centuries through the many scholars who carried it after him. In the Makkah of his youth he was counted among the weak, not because he was enslaved or destitute, but because he held no power in a society that measured men by their clout. He had skill instead. He was a craftsman of bows and arrows and a gifted archer, and he was described as having the look almost of a lion, short and dark, with thick hair and real physical strength. He was honest, and he was unknown, which in Makkah amounted to the same thing.

The moon he followed

When he woke from the dream of the dark plain and the rising moon, Saad heard that a man was quietly calling people to a new faith. He went into the streets of Ajyad and found Abu Bakr as-Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him), and Abu Bakr called him to Islam, and he accepted. Only then did the dream finish explaining itself. The three figures he had seen ahead of him at the moon were Ali ibn Abi Talib, Zayd ibn Harithah, and Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with them), the very first to believe. He had been shown the light and the ones who reached it before him, and now he had reached it too.

He used to say of himself that no one embraced Islam before the day he embraced it, and that for seven days he was one third of all the Muslims on the earth. He was among the very first, by most accounts the seventh person to accept the faith. There is a quiet pattern in his story that runs through the whole company of

the ten who were promised Paradise: half of them came to Islam as teenagers, and half of them came through the hand of Abu Bakr. Saad was both. A young man, unmarried, living with his mother, who had followed a moon in a dream straight to the truth.

The mother who would not eat

He went home to tell his mother. She did not strike him, and she did not send anyone to torture him as some parents did to their children in those days. What she did was, in its own way, heavier. She turned her grief into a weapon and aimed it at the one thing she knew he could not bear: his love for her.

"What is this religion you have taken," she demanded, "that has pulled you away from the religion of your mother and your father?" When she saw she could not argue him out of it, she made a vow. She would not eat. She would not drink. She would not take shelter from the sun. She would not comb her hair. She sat herself outside and let herself waste away, and she told him plainly that if he did not return to the religion of his people, it was his heart that would break. He would carry the regret of it forever. The people would condemn him as the son who let his mother die.

Think about what that asked of him. Saad loved his mother. He kept coming back to her with food and water, trying to cover her from the heat, pleading, "O my mother, do not do this." And she kept refusing. Not until you leave your religion. Not until you leave your religion. He watched her grow weaker by the day, watched the vow take its toll on her body, and still she would not relent, and neither would he.

At last he said the words that settled it. As much as I love you, he told her, my love for Allah and His Messenger ﷺ is stronger. And

then, so there could be no mistaking him: "Even if you had a hundred souls, and they left your body one after another, I would not leave my religion." This will yield you nothing, he was telling her. You will die, and I will be left with grief, but I will not give up my faith. When she finally understood that no amount of self-inflicted suffering would move him, she gave up the vow and began to eat again.

A mother censured, a kindness commanded

Here is the astonishing part. When Allah revealed verses about this very incident, He did not curse the mother. He did not condemn her or expose her. The scholars say it was about Saad and his mother that Allah sent down the words in Surah Luqman, and what came down was not a rebuke of her at all but a command to her son about how to treat her.

We have commanded people to be good to their parents: their mothers carried them, with strain upon strain, and it takes two years to wean them. Give thanks to Me and to your parents- all will return to Me. If they strive to make you associate with Me anything about which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them. Yet keep their company in this life according to what is right, and follow the path of those who turn to Me.

QUR'AN 31:14-15

Sit with the balance of it. She was commanding him with kufr, to disbelieve in Allah, and in the same breath Allah was commanding him with shukr toward her, with gratitude and excellent treatment. Do not obey her in the one thing that would cost you your faith, and in everything else be good to her, keep her company with kindness, honor the woman who carried you in pain and nursed you in pain. There was no obedience to the

creation in disobeying the Creator, and yet there was no licence to be cruel to a parent who pushed you toward it.

If that was the duty Saad owed a mother who starved herself to pull him from Allah, the question lands squarely on the rest of us. What excuse do any of us have for how we treat parents who never asked anything of the kind?

The arrows of Uhud

Saad gave the rest of his life to the companionship of the Prophet ﷺ, and he brought his craft with him. He has the distinction of being the first man to shed blood in the cause of Islam. In the earliest days, when the Muslims could not pray openly and slipped into the valleys and alleyways of Makkah to pray in secret, a group of them was attacked, and Saad was the first to strike a man in defence of the faith. He was the first to loose an arrow in the path of Allah.

He made the migration, and he was at Badr, where he fought bravely and where one of the few martyrs of that battle was his own younger brother, Umayr ibn Abi Waqqas, a boy so young the Prophet ﷺ had first tried to send him home. Umayr had hidden among the ranks and wept and begged to stay, and he was granted his wish, and he was killed. Those who visit Badr today and walk out to the graves of its martyrs find them few, and far from the usual paths, and the place carries a weight that is hard to describe.

But it was at Uhud that Saad became unforgettable. When the lines broke and most of the army scattered, he was among the small band who would not leave the Prophet ﷺ. While others guarded him with swords, some catching arrows on their own bodies, Saad stood and fired. He picked up arrows and shot in

every direction with a precision that held the enemy back from the Prophet's side. And the companions kept feeding him arrows so he would not stop, and the Prophet ﷺ himself was gathering arrows and handing them to him.

It was on that day that the Prophet ﷺ said to Saad what he is not recorded to have said to any other man. "Shoot, Saad. May my father and mother be sacrificed for you." Companions said those words to the Prophet ﷺ, may my father and mother be your ransom. For the Prophet ﷺ to say them to a man was something else entirely. Ali (may Allah be pleased with him), who knew the Prophet ﷺ as well as anyone alive, said that the Prophet ﷺ never combined his father and mother in a tribute like that for anyone except Saad ibn Abi Waqqas.

A prayer that did not miss

The Prophet ﷺ gave Saad something even greater than that tribute. He made a supplication for him, asking Allah to guide his aim and to answer his prayers: "O Allah, answer Saad when he calls upon You." From that day, Saad carried a gift that everyone around him came to know. His supplications were answered. And men learned to fear being on the wrong side of them.

Years later, when Saad was governor over the Muslims in Iraq, a man slandered him with a string of lies and dragged false complaints about him all the way to Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him). Saad, wronged, prayed against him, and the man lost his sight and lived out a wretched life. On another occasion a man in Iraq was publicly cursing Ali (may Allah be pleased with him). Saad told him to stop. The man mocked him and dared him to do something about it. Saad warned that if he did not stop, Saad would pray against him, and still the man jeered. So Saad made wudu, prayed two units, and

supplicated, and it is said a beast came and trampled the man like nothing anyone had seen. Saad did not spend this gift on petty grievances. He used it in the hardest seasons, against open injustice and against tongues set loose in a time of strife, and he used it because he was a man wronged, and Allah does not turn away the prayer of the oppressed.

The third, and only the third

There is one more scene from the Prophet's lifetime that has shaped the lives of Muslims ever since. During the conquest of Makkah, Saad fell so ill that he believed he was dying. He was still under forty, wealthy, generous, known for his charity, and he had only a single daughter to inherit from him. When the Prophet ﷺ came to visit him, Saad asked whether he could will away two thirds of his wealth in charity. No, said the Prophet ﷺ. Half, then? No. A third? "A third," the Prophet ﷺ said, "and a third is much." It is better, he taught him, to leave your heirs provided for than to leave them poor and begging from others. And then the gentlest line of all: whatever you spend seeking the face of Allah, you will be rewarded for it, even the morsel you lift to your own wife's mouth.

From a man who thought he was dying, the whole ummah received the rule of its inheritance: give no more than a third away at death, and do not leave your family in ruin. But Saad did not die. The Prophet ﷺ prayed for his healing, and Allah cured him, and the life that was spared turned out to be one of the most consequential lives of the age. Saad would be the last of the ten promised Paradise to pass away. And it was Saad, under Umar, who would lead the Muslim armies against the Persian Empire, the largest power of its world.

At Qadisiyyah, against an army that used war elephants, it was Saad who devised the strategy of striking the beasts in their unprotected eyes. Through battle after brutal battle he led the Muslims until the palace of Khosrow himself fell, the great emperor whose cruelty had once filled the world. And there is a quiet picture from those days worth holding onto: as Saad entered that palace, Salman al-Farsi (may Allah be pleased with him) was at his side. Two men whose stories had begun the same way in opposite corners of the earth, one whose father had chained and tortured him for leaving his religion, one whose mother had starved herself to pull him from his, both of whom had endured the pain of the people they loved most and refused to give up their faith, now standing together as Allah opened the gates of an empire to them.

The man who wanted to disappear

When Umar was struck down, he named Saad among the small council who would choose the next leader. Saad could have made himself caliph. He was plainly among the handful qualified for it. He wanted no part of it. He wanted no part of the glory, no part of the leadership, and above all no part of the fighting that was coming, Muslim against Muslim, in the long fitna ahead.

This was the man who had loosed the first arrow in Islam, who had shielded the Prophet ﷺ at Uhud, who had broken the Persian Empire. And his choice, at the end, was to withdraw. He narrated the words of the Prophet ﷺ that to fight a Muslim is disbelief and to abuse him is corruption, and he lived by them. He narrated that in a time of dissension, the one who sits is better than the one who stands, the one who stands better than the one who walks, the one who walks better than the one who runs. The less you do when the fitna breaks, the better. So he took his

sheep into the mountains and tended his crops, away from everyone, and gave himself to spreading the faith rather than fighting over its rule. The early accounts even carry his da'wah as far as China.

One of his sons, hungry for a share of the power, came to him there in the hills. When Saad saw him approaching he said, "I seek refuge in Allah from the evil of what he is bringing." The son urged him to go out and claim his rightful place, to assert himself, to take the glory that was his for the taking. Saad refused all of it, and answered with a hadith he carried from the Prophet ﷺ: "Allah loves the servant who is God-conscious, free of need, and unseen." Taqi, ghaniyy, khafiyy. Pious, leaving off sin. Independent, asking nothing from people. Hidden, sought out by no one. That was how he chose to end a life that had been anything but hidden, self-sufficient and obscure and in awe of Allah, indulging neither the people's praise nor their wealth nor their quarrels. He passed away that way, in the time of Mu'awiyah, the last of the ten promised Paradise to go.

What Saad's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like Saad's as a tale of bravery, the archer at Uhud, the conqueror of empires, and to leave it there, admired and untouched. But the parts of his story that should reach us most are the quietest ones.

Start with his mother. He loved her, and she used that love against him, starving herself in front of him to break his faith. He did not crack, and he did not turn cruel. He kept bringing her food, kept covering her from the sun, kept calling her "my mother," and simply would not obey her in the one thing that would have cost him Allah. That is the exact shape of true love of Allah: not loud, not harsh, but unbreakable underneath, and

gentle on the surface. Most of us are tested far more lightly than Saad was, by a parent's disappointment, a friend's pressure, a culture that pulls at us, and we bend. His life asks whether your devotion to Allah can hold its ground while your kindness to people stays soft, both at once, the way the verse of Luqman commands.

Then there is his aim, and the prayer behind it. The Prophet ﷺ asked Allah to answer Saad's calls, and Allah did, and Saad spent that gift carefully, on justice and not on spite. The lesson is not that we will be given his miracle. It is what made him worthy of it. He was a man wronged who turned to Allah rather than to revenge, who reached for wudu and two units of prayer when others reached for insults. When you are wronged, and you will be, where does your hand go first? His went to the prayer mat. That is a habit any of us can build today, before the wrong even comes: to make our complaint to Allah and trust Him to settle it.

And then there is the ending, which is the strangest gift of all. A man who could have ruled chose to be unseen. Taqi, ghaniyy, khafiyy, God-conscious, free of need, hidden. He understood something we keep forgetting: that the soul is not fed by power or applause or wealth, and that there is a profound safety in wanting less of all three. He took his sheep to the hills not out of weakness but out of clarity, because he knew what was worth his remaining days and what was not. Ask yourself how much of your striving is for things that will not feed your soul, and how much lighter you would walk if, like Saad, you simply stopped reaching for them. He gave his strength to good, and he refused to spend it on what he knew was empty.

So take one of these into your ordinary week. Hold to Allah while staying gentle with the people who test you. Make your next

grievance a prayer instead of a grudge. And loosen your grip on one thing you have been chasing for the eyes of others, and do it quietly, for Allah, who sees what is hidden. That is how the archer lived once the battles were over: God-conscious, content, and unseen by everyone but the One whose sight is the only one that lasts. May Allah be pleased with Saad ibn Abi Waqqas, grant us a share of his steadfastness and his contentment, and gather us with him and the company of the Prophet ﷺ in Paradise.

This chapter follows the account of Saad ibn Abi Waqqas (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (31:14-15). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Uthman ibn Affan

Selfless Even When Slandered

There is a moment near the end of his life when the man who had given more to this religion than almost anyone alive sat in his own house, surrounded by people who wanted him dead, with a copy of the Qur'an open in his lap. He had the means to fight back. He had men of the caliber of Ali and Talha and Zubayr standing ready, asking only for the word. And he refused all of it. He would rather be the first leader of this ummah killed by its own members than let one of them be killed in his name. That refusal, held to the very end, is the heart of who Uthman ibn Affan (may Allah be pleased with him) was.

To understand it, you have to follow him from a tree in Hudaibiyah to a besieged house in Madinah, and watch a man whose character never bent, even when everything around him was built to break him.

The hand of the Prophet

In the sixth year after the migration, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ set out with around fourteen hundred companions toward Makkah, intending the lesser pilgrimage. They were stopped at a place called Hudaibiyah. Instead of the pilgrimage, Allah had written for them a treaty, a quiet conquest that would open more doors for the message than any pilgrimage that year could have.

While they waited, the Prophet ﷺ sent Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him) into Makkah as his ambassador. The choice made sense. Uthman had the protection of his tribe and relationships in the city from before Islam, and the people of Makkah still held a deep reverence for him. He went and negotiated on behalf of the Prophet ﷺ and the Muslims, and Quraysh held him up, stalling. Then a rumor reached the believers waiting outside the city: Uthman had been killed.

Consider what that did to those hearts. They loved him, and they loved him because they loved Allah, and now they believed his blood had been spilled. The Prophet ﷺ called them to a pledge, and it was a pledge of death: that they would march on Makkah and meet whatever awaited them, even their own deaths, to answer for the murder of Uthman. One by one, fourteen hundred came to him under a tree and gave that pledge. Only one hypocrite held back. And Allah recorded what He saw in them:

God was pleased with the believers when they swore allegiance to you [Prophet] under the tree: He knew what was in their hearts and so He sent tranquillity down to them and rewarded them with a speedy triumph

QUR'AN 48:18

The Prophet ﷺ said of those fourteen hundred that they were the best people on the face of the earth. And when he had finished taking every hand, he did something for Uthman that he did for no one else. He took his own blessed hand, clasped it with the other, and said: this is for me, and this is for Uthman. How many would have given everything to be that hand that day. Just as Uthman had missed the battle of Badr and yet been counted among its veterans, here he missed the very pledge sworn over

his own name, and the Prophet ﷺ counted it for him with his own hand.

And here is the detail that tells you who Uthman was. In Makkah, Quraysh had offered him a private mercy: he alone could circle the Kaaba in peace while the Muslims stayed outside. He refused. He would not make tawaf before the Prophet ﷺ made tawaf. When some companions later wondered whether Uthman might have stayed behind to complete it, the Prophet ﷺ, who knew him, said no. No matter how long he stays in Makkah, he will not circle the House until I do. This is not Uthman.

The glad tidings that came with a warning

There is a theme that runs through Uthman's years with the Prophet ﷺ like a thread you cannot unsee once you have noticed it. No fewer than ten times, the Prophet ﷺ told this man, the most beloved of Makkah and the most generous of the Muslims, that one day he would be killed. And Uthman lived knowing it.

Abu Musa al-Ash'ari (may Allah be pleased with him) tells of one of these moments. He had found the Prophet ﷺ in a garden of Madinah, withdrawn from the people, sitting at the edge of a well with his legs dangling toward the water, slowly stirring the mud with a stick. A man came to the gate asking to enter. The Prophet ﷺ said: open it for him, and give him the glad tidings of Paradise. It was Abu Bakr. Then another. It was Umar, and again the glad tidings of Paradise. Then a third came, and the Prophet ﷺ, who had been leaning, sat up and said: open the gate for him, and give him glad tidings of Paradise after a trial that will befall him. It was Uthman ibn Affan. He had not said this for Abu Bakr or Umar. He said it only for this man. And Uthman, hearing of the garden of Paradise and the hardship that would precede it, answered like someone who already understood: Allah alone is the One whose

help is sought. Then he came in and sat across from the three of them at the well.

On the mountain of Uhud, when the rock trembled beneath the feet of the Prophet ﷺ and his three companions, he said: be firm, Uhud, for upon you is a Prophet, a man of truth, and two martyrs. Abu Bakr the truthful, and Umar and Uthman, two who would be killed.

Once he told Uthman directly: Allah may clothe you in a garment, and if the hypocrites want you to take it off, do not remove it until you meet me. The garment was the leadership of the ummah. Years later, when Uthman in his old age was tempted to step down and let the trouble pass, it was Abdullah ibn Abbas who reminded him: do not take off a garment that Allah has clothed you with. Remember what the Prophet ﷺ told you.

And there is the scene Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) described, of the day the Prophet ﷺ received guests while reclining at ease. Abu Bakr came, and he stayed as he was. Umar came, and he stayed as he was. Then Uthman asked to enter, and the Prophet ﷺ sat up and straightened his clothing and received him in a way he had not received the other two. When Aisha later asked him why, he gave her one of the most extraordinary descriptions ever given of a human being. Should I not feel shy, he said, before a man before whom even the angels feel shy.

This was the man. Shy to the point that angels were shy of him. Generous past counting. Beloved of the Prophet ﷺ, his son-in-law twice over. And he was told, again and again, that the ending would be hard.

Why him, of all people

His leadership of the ummah was long, and most of it was light upon light. For more than a decade Islam spread under him in far-reaching ways, the borders of faith pushed outward, the affairs of the community strengthened. Those years deserve a study of their own, yet attention rushes past them to the last few years, to the trial.

So the question presses itself. Why this man? Why should the noblest and most generous of leaders, the one before whom angels were shy, be the very first to be assassinated, and assassinated by people saying there is no god but Allah, who imagined they were acting for Allah's sake?

The answer the history gives is sobering. The only way to stop so great a man and so much good was not from outside. It was to sow division within. When discord takes root, a people become too consumed with themselves to build anything, and by the time they realize how barren it was, the damage is beyond repair. That is what makes the trial of Uthman so frightening. Even among that generation, with companions still alive, it could happen.

And it began, as such things so often do, with rumors. There is an incident in Sahih al-Bukhari that deserves to be felt slowly. Abdullah ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) was sitting among companions during the Hajj when a man from Egypt approached and did not even recognize him. He came to him with a list. Did you know Uthman fled from the battle of Uhud. Yes. Did you know Uthman was not present at Badr. Yes. Did you know Uthman was not at the pledge under the tree. Yes. The man was scandalized. How could you let such a person lead.

And Ibn Umar, who had been there for all of it, answered him. As for Uhud, Allah Himself revealed forgiveness for those who withdrew that day. As for Badr, Uthman was absent only because

the Prophet ﷺ had ordered him to stay and care for his sick wife, the Prophet's own daughter, and then counted him among the veterans of Badr regardless. And as for the pledge under the tree, the whole pledge had been sparked by the rumor of Uthman's death; he was its very cause. Three facts, each true on its surface, each twisted into the opposite of its meaning. And this was while the companions still lived, with no social media, nothing but letters and word of mouth. Look how the half-truths spun, and how the trial built.

It grew from there into a web. They said he practiced favoritism. They said he stole from the public treasury and spent it on his family. They said he had changed the pulpit and innovated in the call to the dawn prayer. Accusation after accusation, until the air around him became impossible to breathe. There were people who joined the movement against him from a place they believed was righteous, because they had swallowed the lies whole. Among them, astonishingly, was Muhammad, the youngest son of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, a young man caught up in a fitna whose true shape he could not see.

Where he found his refuge

When a person is in hardship, where do they go for ease?
Uthman went where every believer should go: to the Qur'an.

This was not a habit that appeared at the end. He used to say that if our hearts were truly pure, they would never have their fill of the words of Allah, never tire of them, never quench their thirst for them. The purer the heart, he taught by his own life, the more it craves the Book. He would hate for a single day to pass in which he did not look upon the pages of the mushaf. When the siege reached its peak, one of his household cried out to the men outside: kill him or leave him, but know that this is a man who

used to bring his whole night to life with the Qur'an in a single unit of prayer.

And so what scholars remind us of is this. The way a person dies is rarely a sudden gift. Saying there is no god but Allah at the moment of death does not arrive for someone who did not live by it. Those words can only take root in a heart that has been constant upon them. Uthman's nearness to the Qur'an was his whole life, and so at the very end, when the men finally broke into his home, they found him reading. He was reciting when they struck him. A page of the Qur'an, and on it, by the decree of Allah, his blood. That ending was the fruit of a lifetime.

And because the Qur'an had soaked into him, its character became his character. Think of the verse he must have read so many times:

You who believe, do not cancel out your charitable deeds with reminders and hurtful words, like someone who spends his wealth only to be seen by people, not believing in God and the Last Day...

QUR'AN 2:264

Imagine what that does to a man like Uthman. When the people of the trial pressed in, he never came out to remind them of all he had done, never said: do you not know I gave this, do you not remember what I built for you. His modesty, the same shyness that the angels honored, sealed his lips on his own good. He would not boast of his charity, and he would not wound the very people he had given to.

Not a drop of blood

So watch what he does as the siege tightens, and you will see a man whose sincerity was never to himself. He feared being an oppressor more than he feared being oppressed. There is a small story that shows the whole of him. As an old man he once pinched a young servant to get his attention, and saw that the boy looked hurt. So he bent down and told him: pinch me back, take my ear and pinch it. The young man refused, again and again, saying he had no wish to do such a thing to his master. Uthman insisted, until the boy gave the gentlest touch, and Uthman told him to do it harder. When the boy would not, Uthman explained: the retaliation of this world is far easier to bear than the retaliation of the next. The leader of the ummah, begging a servant to pinch his ear so no debt would follow him to Allah.

Now bring that same man to the door of his besieged house. Around him stood Ali, al-Hasan and al-Husayn, Talha and Zubayr, may Allah be pleased with them all, men of weight and devotion, saying: let us fight for you, give us the word. And Uthman said: do not shed a drop of blood for my sake. Not one drop.

This is where his whole life comes to its point. After everything he had poured into the ummah, when it turned on him, he did not change. His sincerity had never been to his own honor. It was to Allah, to His Messenger ﷺ, and to this ummah. And so he chose to be the first of its leaders killed by its own hands rather than to have those hands stained with blood spilled in his name. He held that sincerity, unbroken, to the moment he died.

The promise kept at the well

On the last day of his life, a Thursday, Uthman was fasting. He lay down for a short rest, and in his sleep he saw the Prophet ﷺ, who said to him: Uthman, have they kept you from water? Yes, Messenger of Allah. They were starving him, setting fire to his

house, even barring him from praying in the mosque. And the Prophet ﷺ said: rejoice, Uthman. Tonight you will break your fast with us, with me and Abu Bakr and Umar.

He woke filled with joy. What is left of this world for a man who has the Prophet ﷺ waiting for him at the table that very night. And so it happened. He was killed reading the Qur'an, fasting, ready to break that fast in the company he had longed for.

Return, for a moment, to that garden at the beginning, to the well where the Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr and Umar dangled their feet in the water, and Uthman entered last and sat across from the three of them. The people who killed him would not even allow him a public funeral, fearing the grief it would stir. They forced his burial at night and denied him a place in the Baqi near the Prophet ﷺ and his two companions, burying him apart and in silence. And yet it was observed that the way he had sat at that well, across from the three of them, was the very way he came to be buried. And Allah willed that in time the cemetery of the Baqi should widen until it folded his grave back in, so that today, when you walk into the Baqi in Madinah, you find Uthman gathered back among them after all.

What Uthman's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read this and feel only sorrow, or only awe, and set Uthman somewhere too high to touch us. That would be a waste of him. His life is not a sealed tragedy to be mourned. It is a question pressed against our own iman.

He found his refuge in the Qur'an, and he found it long before he needed it. This is the lesson that should reach us first, because it is the most ordinary and the most within reach. The peace he had in the worst weeks of his life, sitting with the Book open while

men gathered to kill him, was not summoned in that moment. It was built across years of returning to the words of Allah on quiet days when nothing was wrong. We tend to reach for the Qur'an only when the house is already on fire. He kept it open every single day. Ask yourself when you last let a day pass without looking at a page of it, and what you are storing up for the day you will truly need it. The death you hope to die is shaped by the life you actually live.

He gave everything and never reminded anyone. He had financed the religion, equipped its armies, dug wells for its thirsty, and when the same people turned on him with lies, his modesty would not even let him list what he had done in his own defense. That is ikhlas, sincerity, the rarest and most freeing thing a heart can carry: to do the deed for Allah, to be content that He has seen it, and to feel no need for anyone else to know. Most of us keep a quiet ledger of our good, ready to produce it the moment we are unappreciated. He kept no ledger at all, because his account was only ever with Allah. Do one good thing this week that no one will ever trace back to you, let it be for Allah alone, and notice how clean it feels.

He refused to defend himself with harm, because he feared being an oppressor more than being wronged. When the swords were offered to him, he chose to absorb the wrong rather than answer it with blood. Most of us, when we are wronged, want only to be proven right and to see the other side pay. His life asks a harder thing: that we fear our own capacity to oppress, that we hold our hand back even when striking would be justified, because we would rather meet Allah wronged than meet Him having wronged. In an ordinary life this is the argument you walk away from, the retaliation you forgo, the last word you choose not to take, all of it for Him.

And underneath all of it lay a trust that nothing was ever lost. He had been told ten times that the ending would be hard, and he met it not with bitterness but with Allah alone is the One whose help is sought, and at the very end with joy, because he knew where he was going and who was waiting. What looked like a noble man abandoned and destroyed was, in truth, a man being carried straight to the table of the Prophet ﷺ. This is the promise that should steady you when your own hardship comes. What you give to Allah, He keeps. What you suffer for His sake, He sees. What the world calls your ruin, He may be writing as your deliverance.

So carry one thing of his into your own days. Open the Book before you need it. Do a good deed no one will ever know was yours. Let go of one retaliation you could have justified, and let it be for Allah. That is how the most beloved and most slandered of men lived, in modesty, in sincerity, in trust that held to the last breath, and it is a road still open to anyone who wants to walk even a few steps of it. May Allah be pleased with Uthman, the shy one before whom the angels were shy, grant us a measure of his sincerity, and gather us with him and his companions at the well of the Prophet ﷺ.

This chapter follows the account of Uthman ibn Affan (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (48:18, 2:264). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Uthman ibn Affan

The Possessor of Two Lights

There is a way that the four rightly guided caliphs are spoken of, and in that telling one of them is quietly underserved. Abu Bakr, Umar, Ali: the names roll forward, and somewhere in the middle Uthman ibn Affan (may Allah be pleased with him) slips by, not given his full due, not loved with the love he earned. Yet here is a man who resembled the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in his face and in his character, who married not one but two daughters of the Messenger of God, who poured a fortune into the cause of Allah until the Prophet ﷺ said that nothing could harm him after what he had done. To understand the weight of him, you have to meet him before Islam, and then watch how a man with everything to lose ran toward the truth without hesitating.

A man who had it all

His name was Uthman ibn Affan ibn Abi al-As, of the powerful tribe of Banu Umayyah, and his lineage met the Prophet's own at their shared ancestor Abd Manaf. The connection ran closer still through his mother. Her name was Arwa, and her mother was Umm Hakim al-Bayda bint Abd al-Muttalib, the full sister, and by some narrations the twin, of Abdullah, the father of the Prophet ﷺ. That made Uthman a second cousin of the Messenger of God, a kinship not widely known.

His father died in the days of ignorance and left him a vast fortune, by some reports more than thirty million dirhams. His mother accepted Islam and lived all the way into his caliphate, and he prayed over her at her death. Before Islam the people called him Abu Amr, the name of a son not yet born, for he had no children in those years. He was about six years younger than the Prophet ﷺ, and when the histories describe his appearance it is as if they are describing the Messenger of God himself: neither short nor tall, broad shouldered, skin softer than silk, a thick beard, hair falling just below his ears, a handsome face with a small gap between his teeth. It was said that if your gaze landed on Uthman you would not want to look away, for the amount of beauty Allah had placed in him. He spoke with eloquence. He was rich, he was powerful, and he carried none of the arrogance that usually travels with those things.

What was most striking about him was a quality you would not expect from a man so wealthy, so handsome, so high born: hayaa, modesty. He came from a proud clan. His half brother through his mother was al-Walid ibn Uqba, son of one of the cruelest tormentors of the Prophet ﷺ. He was richer and more beautiful than the men around him, and yet he was known not for any of that but for his shyness, his bashfulness, his gentleness. The Prophet ﷺ taught that every religion has a defining character, and the character of Islam is modesty, and that modesty is a branch of faith. The more modesty a person carries, the more faith. In Uthman that modesty was so complete that the poor respected him and the rich respected him, the man of a great tribe and the man of no tribe at all, every one of them, for the character he carried.

And his restraint was not a pose. He never prostrated to an idol in the age of ignorance. He never committed any indecency. He

refused alcohol before it was ever forbidden, saying that wine destroys the mind, and the mind is a gift from God. He said he never once looked at the nakedness of another, before Islam or after, in a time when men bathed in the open. He stayed away from the parties and the songs and the entertainments of Quraysh, finding nothing in them he wanted. Strip away his name and most of what has just been described is a description of the Prophet ﷺ.

He was well traveled and well read, knowing the lineages of the Arabs, their histories, the lands and customs of Syria and Yemen and Abyssinia, all of it gathered on his trade routes before Islam. And he never came back from a journey without the people of Makkah feeling his generosity. He gave so freely, and his character was so loved, that a mother in Makkah would say to her child the highest words of affection she could find: I love you by the Most Merciful the way Quraysh loves Uthman. This is the man the Prophet ﷺ pointed to when he taught that the best of people in the days of ignorance are the best of them in Islam, once they are given understanding. Uthman already carried the manners of Islam before he ever heard its call.

The one who did not hesitate

Usually it is the one with the most to lose who hesitates. A man holding a fortune, a name, the love of an entire city, weighs the cost before he answers. Uthman did not weigh it. He was returning from a trade journey to Syria, and on the way back, by one narration, he slept and saw a dream in which a voice called to the sleepers to rise, for Ahmad had appeared in Makkah. When he reached the city, he heard that the Prophet ﷺ had begun to call people to Islam, and at once he was ready.

It was Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) who came to him. Abu Bakr did not merely believe; he became the great ambassador of the message, going to the luminaries of his people and bringing them in. So much of the good that would later flow from Uthman, and from Abdul Rahman ibn Awf, and from Talha and Zubayr, traces back to Abu Bakr who first called them. Abu Bakr knew how to approach a man like Uthman because he was of that same noble class, a man who also shunned the idols and the wine and the cruelty of his people. He came to Uthman as he returned from Syria and invited him to Islam, and Uthman went straight to the Prophet ﷺ and accepted it. By the account of Ibn Ishaq he was the fourth male to enter Islam, after Abu Bakr, Ali, and Zayd ibn Haritha, and he believed even before the Prophet ﷺ took the believers to the house of al-Arqam to teach them.

He knew exactly what it would cost. A man as beloved and as wealthy as Uthman understood that he could go from the most loved of people to the most hated in a single turn. It did not stop him. And when he believed, the persecution came. The powerful of Makkah were tortured privately by their own tribes, who wanted to save face while still crushing the faith out of their own. Uthman was seized by his relative al-Hakam ibn Abi al-As, who tortured him and ordered him to abandon Islam and leave the company of Muhammad ﷺ. Uthman answered the same way every time: I will never give up Islam, and I will never part from him. In the end al-Hakam gave up, because Uthman would not. He had never been a man of tribal politics or public confrontation; his danger to Quraysh was simpler and deeper. He was so loved that his faith alone would draw others in. The child who grew up hearing "I love you the way Quraysh loves Uthman" would now learn that Uthman had become a Muslim.

The first family to leave for the sake of God

When Abu Lahab set himself to wound the Prophet ﷺ in every way he could, he ordered his two sons to divorce the Prophet's two daughters, Ruqayyah and Umm Kulthum, whose marriages had not yet been consummated. Ruqayyah was hurt by it, as anyone would be. And then look at the replacement Allah sent her. Uthman, who by every indication had never married, came to ask for her hand. She went from the son of Abu Lahab to the most beloved, most beautiful, most noble man Quraysh knew. The Prophet ﷺ and Khadijah were overjoyed; there is no better suitor for a daughter than Uthman. And on the marriage the Prophet ﷺ said to Ruqayyah, my daughter, take good care of Abu Abdullah, for he is the closest of my companions to me in character. His kunya itself was changing, from Abu Amr to Abu Abdullah. They became the most blessed couple the people knew, the most beautiful and the most loved, and in love with one another. Every gentle quality the people admired in Uthman from a distance, he brought home to the daughter of the Messenger of God.

His torture continued privately, and the scholars note that there was wisdom in sending Uthman among those who would migrate to Abyssinia. He had been there on trade. He knew its land, its people, its customs. There was also trust in the Prophet ﷺ sending his own daughter among the migrants in his care. So Uthman and Ruqayyah were not only among those who made that first hijra; by a beautiful narration, weak in its chain yet powerful in its meaning, Uthman was the first man to migrate with his family for the sake of Allah after the Prophet Lut, peace be upon him. He gave up the comfort of Makkah and carried his household across the sea for God.

He who runs when the Prophet calls

The story of Uthman in Islam truly unfolds in Madinah. He came there with Ruqayyah and their son Abdullah, and the Prophet ﷺ paired him with Abu Talha. Uthman needed little help; he had kept and grown his trade even in Abyssinia, and within a short time he had bought his own home and returned to the marketplace, building his fortune as he always had, now to spend it on noble things. He was honest in his dealings when others took the short and crooked route, and his honesty drew people to do business with him.

And then a pattern begins, repeated so often the narrations are hard to count. Whenever the Prophet ﷺ made a call and attached to it the reward of Paradise, Uthman ran forward. When the migrants struggled for water in Madinah, there was a well called Rumah whose owner held a monopoly and charged the people dearly. The Prophet ﷺ said that whoever buys the well of Rumah will have Paradise. The owner would not sell it outright, so Uthman, the shrewd merchant, negotiated: he bought half the well, one day his and the next day the owner's, for twenty thousand dirhams. Then he told the people that on his day the water was a free endowment, take as much as you need. No one came on the owner's day. The high price collapsed on the man who set it, and he came to Uthman to sell the other half, and Uthman, who no longer needed it, negotiated him down and took the whole well for charity. That well has watered gardens in Madinah from that day until this. Its endowment still runs, the reward still flowing to a man who has been in his grave for fourteen centuries because he jumped, once, at the call of the Prophet ﷺ.

The Prophet ﷺ called again: who will buy the land beside the mosque so it can be expanded, in exchange for something better

in Paradise? Uthman answered, I have it, and bought it for twenty thousand dirhams, and the mosque was widened by his hand. The Prophet ﷺ taught that whoever frees a slave, Allah frees their whole body from the Fire, and from the day Uthman heard it until the day he could no longer do it, every Friday he bought the freedom of people in bondage, so many that no one could count them.

Then came Tabuk, the expedition the histories call the army of hardship. The Prophet ﷺ asked who would equip it, and Uthman stood and gave a hundred camels, fully outfitted. The Prophet ﷺ asked again, and Uthman gave another hundred. Again, and another hundred, until he had given nine hundred and forty camels and sixty horses, all equipped for the sake of Allah. While the Qur'an was naming the hypocrites who held back from that very march, Uthman was emptying his wealth into it. He went home and gathered all the gold and silver he could carry and poured it into the lap of the Prophet ﷺ, who turned it over in his hands and said, nothing can harm Uthman after what he has done today. He said it twice. The window in which Allah offers a person the chance to give is sometimes small, and Uthman had stepped through it again and again.

He was not a man of the battlefield, and yet look at what he gave. He would witness the campaigns of the Prophet ﷺ save one, and the story of that one absence is its own.

The day of joy and the day of grief

That campaign was Badr. How could Uthman, fourth to believe, migrant to Abyssinia and to Madinah, miss it? Because Ruqayyah fell gravely ill, and the Prophet ﷺ gave Uthman, who loved her dearly, permission to stay and care for her. So while the others marched, Uthman sat at the side of his sick wife, the daughter of

the Messenger of God, and watched her die before his eyes, the young mother of his child gone. It crushed him. The victory of Badr is remembered as a day of great joy and great sorrow at once, for on the very day Allah gave the believers their unexpected triumph, He took the Prophet's daughter back to Himself.

The Prophet ﷺ knew how badly Uthman had wished to be with him, and so it was a mercy that the veterans of Badr hold a special rank in Islam, and Uthman was given the full reward of being among them though his body was not there. Actions are by intentions, and his intention had been to march. He was counted a man of Badr.

But the grief did not stop. Not long after, the small son, Abdullah, was struck in the face by a bird and an infection spread until it covered his whole face and swelled until the child stopped breathing, dead at six years old. Uthman had now lost his wife, the daughter of the Prophet ﷺ, and his son, the grandson of the Messenger of God. He changed visibly. The sorrow sat on him and would not lift, and the Prophet ﷺ, who loved him, came to ask what weighed on him so. Uthman said it was the death of Ruqayyah, and something else. What is the something else, the Prophet ﷺ asked. Uthman answered: my closeness to you has been severed by her death. He was not only grieving a wife; he was grieving the loss of being joined to the Prophet ﷺ.

Then came something decreed for no other man. The angel Jibril came to the Prophet ﷺ with the command to marry his next daughter, Umm Kulthum, to Uthman, with a dowry like the first and upon the same kindness and love with which he had treated Ruqayyah, because that treatment had been exemplary. This is the meaning of the title Dhu al-Nurayn, the possessor of two

lights. No one else was ever given the honor of marrying two daughters of the Prophet ﷺ.

There is a tender account beside this. Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), wanting a noble husband for his daughter Hafsa, offered her first to Abu Bakr, who said he would think about it and then simply avoided him, and then to Uthman, who put him off and prolonged a prayer until Umar gave up and left. Hurt that both his friends had turned from him, Umar complained to the Prophet ﷺ, who told him that Hafsa would marry someone better than Uthman, and Uthman someone better than Hafsa. The Prophet ﷺ himself would marry Hafsa; Uthman would marry Umm Kulthum. Later the two explained that they had stayed silent only because the Prophet ﷺ had already spoken of Hafsa, and they would not disclose his secret.

In time Umm Kulthum also died, in the lifetime of both the Prophet ﷺ and Uthman. There are narrations of the Prophet ﷺ sitting at the graveside of his daughter and weeping, the sixth of seven children he would bury in his own life. He saw the grief of Uthman, who had now married and lost two of his daughters, and he said to him: by Allah, Uthman, if we had a third, we would marry her to you. Such was his place with the Messenger of God. They would have kept giving him their daughters, one after another, because of who he was.

What Uthman's life asks of our faith

It is tempting to read a life like this and feel only admiration, to place Uthman so high that he asks nothing of us. That would be a loss. His life is not a monument. It is a question put to our own iman.

He did not hesitate when faith would cost him everything. He was the most loved man in his city and one of its richest, and he understood precisely that believing could turn all of that to ash overnight, and he believed anyway, the same day. Most of us hold back when the truth is inconvenient, when it might cost us standing or comfort or the approval of people we want to keep. Uthman's life asks whether you trust Allah's promise enough to answer Him before you have counted what it might take from you. The thing he was sure of was not safe. It was simply true, and he chose it.

He ran toward every good the Prophet ﷺ named. The well, the land for the mosque, the freeing of slaves every Friday, the army at Tabuk: again and again he heard "and they will have Paradise" and he moved before the moment closed. The opportunity to give for Allah is often a small window. Someone needs help today; a good deed is in front of you now; a chance to give quietly will not come again tomorrow. His life asks whether you step through those windows or let them close while you deliberate. You do not need his fortune to learn his speed. You need only to treat the next good thing in front of you as the chance it is, and take it for Allah before it passes.

And he gave for the sake of Allah, not the eyes of people. Notice what he did with the well: he turned a monopoly into a free gift and asked nothing back, and the reward of it still runs in the earth he is buried under. This is the secret the world cannot see. What you give to Allah, He keeps. What looks like loss from the street, the wealth poured out, the comfort surrendered, He may be recording as the very thing that secures you. Uthman freed people he would never be thanked by, watered a city he would not live to see flower, and the Prophet ﷺ said nothing could

harm him after it. That is sincerity, ikhlas: to do the deed for Allah alone and be content that He has seen it.

His life asks one thing more, the hardest. He loved deeply and lost much, his wife, his son, his closeness to the Prophet ﷺ, and the histories do not record him railing against the decree of his Lord. He grieved, openly and humanly, and then he received from Allah a gift no other man received. When loss comes to you, and it will, his life asks whether your trust in Allah can survive the taking of the very things you thought you could not live without, and whether you can keep your heart soft and patient while it heals.

So carry one thing from him into your own ordinary day. Answer a good that is in front of you now, before you talk yourself out of it. Give one thing for Allah that no one will ever thank you for. And when something is taken from you, hold steady, without a word of complaint against your Lord. That is how this beloved man lived, in modesty, in speed toward the good, in quiet sincerity, and that way is still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Uthman, the possessor of two lights, and raise us upon a measure of his haste toward Him.

This chapter follows the account of Uthman ibn Affan (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Zaynab bint Muhammad ﷺ

The First Daughter

There is a kind of faith that is loud, that strikes back, that takes a pole to the head of an oppressor. We will meet women like that in this book. Zaynab (may Allah be pleased with her) was not one of them. Her faith was the quieter, harder kind: the faith of a woman caught between the two people she loved most in the world, her father on one side and her husband on the other, the truth pulling one way and her marriage the other, and she held to it for nearly twenty years without ever raising her voice. Her story is laced with pain from beginning to end, and it offers a lens onto the early days of Islam that almost no other life does: what it cost to believe when belief seemed to be tearing your family apart.

She was the eldest daughter of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her), and to understand what she carried, you have to begin in the house she grew up in.

The eldest in the house

The Prophet ﷺ had her when he was about thirty years old, well before any revelation came. He loved her deeply, and the books of seerah record that he praised her often, both because she was his firstborn and because of the traits of her character, which were her own. She had a distinct personality, as all of them did, may Allah be pleased with them.

In that house she was the elder sister, the one the younger ones looked to. She helped her mother Khadijah and was a kind of mentor to her younger sisters, Ruqayyah, Umm Kulthum, and Fatimah (may Allah be pleased with them all). The quiet responsibility of being the one who steadies the others fell on Zaynab early, and she carried it inside the home of the man who would become the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

She married young, as was common in that time and place. Her husband was Abu al-As ibn al-Rabi, and the marriage was not a stranger's marriage but a knitting-together of family. His mother was Hala bint Khuwaylid, the sister of Khadijah, which made Khadijah his maternal aunt and Zaynab his cousin. There was tenderness in that bond beyond the contract of marriage. Years later, in Madinah, after Khadijah had died, the Prophet ﷺ would sometimes hear the voice of Hala and his heart would stir, and he would say, "O Allah, let it be Hala," because Hala resembled Khadijah, and hearing her brought Khadijah back to him for a moment. This was the family Zaynab married into.

On the night of the wedding, Khadijah gave her daughter a gift: a beautiful necklace. It was the most precious thing Zaynab owned. Hold that necklace in your mind, because it will return, and when it does it will break the heart of a Prophet.

A believing wife, a husband who would not follow

Abu al-As was a good man. He was a merchant, like the Prophet ﷺ himself, traveling the trade routes to Syria, known among the people for his honesty and truthfulness. The Prophet ﷺ loved his character, because Abu al-As carried many of the very traits for which the Prophet ﷺ was beloved to his own people.

He was away on a trade journey when the revelation came and the Prophet ﷺ declared his message. While he was gone, Zaynab embraced the religion of her father and her mother. The exact moment of her Islam is not preserved for us the way it is for some of the early companions, but she is counted among the first to believe. Abu al-As returned to a changed world, and to the news that his wife was now a Muslim.

He was placed in a painful position. Abu Lahab had already forced his two sons to divorce Ruqayyah and Umm Kulthum, the Prophet's other daughters, simply to wound him. Now the same pressure came down on Abu al-As to divorce Zaynab. But here we meet one of the diseases of tribalism, and it is not the obvious one. It was not arrogance or the readiness to kill a rival. It was the terror of what people would say. Abu al-As did not want anyone whispering that he had abandoned the religion of his fathers to please his wife. And at the same time, he loved her, and did not want to let her go.

In those early days the marriage of a believing woman to a man who had not yet believed was not forbidden, and so this strange arrangement held. Abu al-As resisted all the pressure to divorce Zaynab, and the Prophet ﷺ appreciated that in him, a nobility in a man who would not bend to the crowd or throw away his wife to protect his reputation. So Zaynab stayed beside a man who knew, in his heart, that her father was the most truthful of the truthful, but who could not take the final step because he feared the tongues of his people more than he loved the truth.

They had two children. The first was a son named Ali, who died very young, and the Prophet ﷺ grieved over him. The second was a daughter, Umamah, who would grow up in the shade of the Prophet ﷺ in Madinah, the granddaughter you find in the

narrations carried and loved by him the way you find al-Hasan and al-Husayn. So they lived, this believing woman and her honest, hesitating husband, balancing a marriage on the edge of a fault line while the message of Islam moved forward around them.

Left behind in Makkah

Then came the migration, and the fault line could no longer hold. When the Prophet ﷺ left Makkah for Madinah, where would Zaynab go? It is one thing to be caught between a persecuted father and a husband who merely refuses to follow him. It is another thing entirely when your father is leaving, the whole community of believers going north, and your husband will not come. Abu al-As was not ready to become Muslim and would not migrate. And so Zaynab faced an impossible choice: leave her husband and go with the believers, or stay in Makkah with her family intact and wait, and hope.

The Prophet ﷺ gave her permission to stay, so that her family would not be torn apart.

Think about what that cost him. He had already buried Khadijah in the soil of Makkah. Now, as he made the migration that would change history, he was leaving his eldest daughter behind in the city of his enemies: pain on his side, a father walking away from his child, and pain on hers, a believing woman left behind while everyone she loved in faith departed.

This is the part of her life worth sitting with. Like the other believing women who remained in Makkah, Zaynab had to sustain her faith alone, in a hostile city, with no community around her, in the long years before the conquest would open Makkah to Islam. Consider how much iman that takes. There is a

kind of believer whose faith is fed by the crowd, by the prayer in congregation, by the company of the righteous. And there is a kind whose faith must burn on its own, in a house surrounded by people who reject everything she holds true. Zaynab was the second kind.

The necklace at Badr

Then came the Battle of Badr, and the fault line opened all the way down.

Abu al-As went out with the Makkan army, against the side of his own father-in-law, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He did not go because he wanted to. Like al-Abbas and others dragged out by their tribes with no desire to fight, he was forced into the field. Imagine what this did to Zaynab: my husband has gone out to fight my father. These were the wounds of those early days, wounds that opened inside a single home.

He was captured early, likely without ever swinging his sword. And when the prisoners of Badr were brought before the Prophet ﷺ, the command he gave was the command of mercy: treat the captives well.

In Makkah, meanwhile, Zaynab was being blamed for everything, her in-laws telling her that her husband's captivity, all of this misfortune, was the fault of her and her father. She had to keep proving her loyalties, pulled apart from both directions at once. And so she did the only thing she could. She took the most precious thing she owned, the necklace her mother Khadijah had given her on her wedding night, and sent it with her husband's brother Amr ibn al-Rabi to her father, asking him to accept it as the ransom.

The Prophet ﷺ was at Badr, making concession after concession to free the prisoners. But with his own son-in-law among the captives, he was careful to show no favoritism. Whatever leniency he gave his own family, he gave to everyone, because to do otherwise would have undermined the justice he was sent to teach. So when the bag came and he was told it was the ransom from his daughter Zaynab, he opened it expecting wealth, perhaps gold.

He pulled out the necklace, and he could not hold back his tears. It was Khadijah's, and it brought her back to him. The companions did not understand why the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was weeping. So he asked them, do you know what this is? They said no. And he told them: this is the necklace that Khadijah gave to Zaynab on the night of her wedding. Then he said that if they were willing, they should release her prisoner and return the necklace to her as well.

This is the detail that should stay with you. Zaynab had not asked for the necklace back. She had given it away gladly, expecting never to see it again, asking only for her husband. But the Prophet ﷺ, out of the compassion of his heart and the memory of the woman who had given it, sent both her husband and the necklace home.

Six years of waiting

But Badr changed something else, something the necklace could not buy back. By now Allah had revealed that the believing women were to be separated from the men who had not believed. The marriage that had survived the migration could not survive this. The Prophet ﷺ sent word that Zaynab was to come to him in Madinah.

Abu al-As, to his credit, honored the request and let her go. There was a skirmish with his clan as she was leaving, and some of the historians record that it was here, in the violence of that departure, that Zaynab suffered a miscarriage whose complications would stay with her for years. So she came to Madinah injured, separated from a husband she still loved.

In Madinah she lived in the presence of her father, who loved her dearly, for she was a living piece of Khadijah. And here is the thing that tells you who Zaynab was: she refused to remarry. Not for a year. Not for two. For six years she would not take another husband, holding out hope that one day Abu al-As would believe, would come to Madinah, and that her family would be whole again.

Six years is a long time to wait on a hope the world would have called foolish. Every practical voice would have told her to move on from a polytheist who had fought against her father. But she had read his character, the same nobility her father had seen, and she would not give up on him.

The reunion, and the farewell

The way it finally happened was not gentle. The Prophet ﷺ learned of a Makkan caravan traveling between Makkah and Syria, and sent a party of companions under Zayd ibn Harithah to intercept it. Among its men was Abu al-As. He was taken prisoner and brought to Madinah a second time, his goods seized, facing ransom once again.

In the middle of the night, before the dawn prayer, he managed to reach Zaynab. She asked him: have you become Muslim? He said no, he was a fugitive seeking refuge. She asked him again to

accept Islam, and he was still not ready. So Zaynab did something remarkable. She waited until the dawn prayer.

Picture the scene. The Prophet ﷺ has just led Fajr in the mosque of Madinah, the companions still gathered around him. And Zaynab calls out, in front of them all, without having told her father a word of it beforehand: "I have granted protection to Abu al-As ibn al-Rabi." The Prophet ﷺ looked at the companions, stunned by what had unfolded, and asked, "Did you hear what I heard?" They said yes. And he swore by the One in whose hand is his soul that he had known nothing of this until he heard it, just as they had. Then he told them that Abu al-As was an honest man, never an enemy of the Muslims, and that if they accepted what Zaynab had done, he would return the man's goods and free him. They said: we have freed the one you have freed.

So the Prophet ﷺ went to Zaynab and told her that her protection was honored, that the man and his goods were free. But there was a hard truth attached. Gently, knowing the emotions she carried, he told her that she could not be with Abu al-As as a wife while he remained a polytheist. Zaynab accepted the condition. And once again she asked her husband to embrace Islam and join his family in the company of the Prophet ﷺ.

And once again, the same fear rose in him. Now he did not want people to say he had become Muslim only to escape captivity. So he chose to return to Makkah first. He owed people money there, and would not have anyone say he had fled to Madinah to escape his debts. He went back, paid every debt, returned every trust held in his name, and asked, is there anything left? They said nothing is left. And then, with his honor clear and nothing holding

him, he said the words: I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.

He made his way back to Madinah, this time not as a prisoner but as a son-in-law and a believer, and the Prophet ﷺ was full of joy, for he had waited the better part of two decades for this man to arrive at the truth. And the first thing Abu al-As asked was whether he could return to Zaynab.

Twenty years after the Prophet ﷺ first proclaimed his message, in the seventh year after the migration, he reunited his daughter with her husband. The marriage was restored. Umamah was in the shade of the Prophet ﷺ, her husband was finally a believer and a noble man, and Zaynab had the life she had waited for through all those years of separation. After everything, she was whole.

It did not last a full year. Zaynab died not long after the reunion she had waited two decades for, her old injuries most likely catching up with her at last. The Prophet ﷺ was devastated, and so was Abu al-As, and the whole household of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

He went to a group of the women, among them Umm Ayman and Sawdah and Umm Salamah and Umm Atiyyah (may Allah be pleased with them all), and instructed them to wash her body with water and camphor an odd number of times, and to let him know when they were finished. When they had, he came in and wept for his daughter, the love of a father laid bare. Then he took his own waist-wrap, his izar, and gave it to them to shroud her in, so that Zaynab was wrapped in the garment of the Prophet ﷺ. And he led the funeral prayer over his eldest daughter, and went down into her grave in al-Baqi the way he had gone down into the

grave of her mother Khadijah, receiving her body with his own hands, comforting Abu al-As and Umamah in their grief.

Abu al-As wept so bitterly that he consoled himself with lines of poetry about how much he missed her. He died about a year later. The man who had taken twenty years to reach her in faith did not last a single year apart from her in death.

What Zaynab's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this as a sad story and stop there. That would be to miss what it asks of you.

Zaynab believed, and then she had to carry that belief through the hardest place a person can carry it: not against a clear enemy, but through the middle of a divided home, with love pulling on both sides. Her father was the truth; her husband was the man she had given her heart to; and for nearly twenty years those two pulls did not resolve. Most of us imagine that faith is tested by enemies. More often it is tested exactly where Zaynab was tested, in the quiet ache of holding to what Allah has said while your heart aches for those you love who have not yet arrived. She did not abandon the truth to keep the peace, nor her husband to prove a point. She held to Allah's command and kept loving and kept waiting, trusting that He could bring it together in His own time. That is sabr, patience of a deep and unglamorous kind, the kind most of us will actually need.

Look at the necklace, too, because it is the heart of her sincerity. When she sent the most precious thing she owned to ransom her husband, she expected to lose it forever, and she sent it without a word of reluctance, without announcing it. She simply gave, quietly, what she loved, for the sake of what she loved more. That is ikhlas: to give for Allah's sake and for the people He has placed

in your care, without keeping score, without needing the world to see. Ask yourself what you would send if it meant never seeing it again, and whether you could send it the way she did, in silence, trusting Allah to settle the account.

And look at the six years of waiting. The world told her to give up on Abu al-As, and the world was being reasonable. But Zaynab held a hope grounded not in wishful thinking but in trust: trust in the character she had seen in him, and beneath that, trust in Allah, who turns hearts. She did not force the outcome. She prayed, she waited, she kept calling him, and she left the timing to her Lord. There is someone in your life whom you have quietly given up on, a relative who will not pray, a friend drifting from the deen, and Zaynab's life asks whether you have written them off when you should still be hoping and asking Allah for them. Hidayah is His to give. Twenty years is not too long for Him.

Here is what should lift your heart. From the streets of Makkah, Zaynab's life looked like one long loss: a marriage half-broken, a migration without her, a captured husband, a miscarriage, six lonely years, a reunion that lasted barely a season. But nothing she gave for Allah was wasted. Her patience was seen. Her sincerity was recorded. Her husband, the man she refused to give up on, died a believer because she would not stop calling him home. And she herself was buried in the garment of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, lowered into the earth by the hands of the Prophet ﷺ whom she had loved and obeyed and never abandoned. What the world saw as a life of sorrow, Allah was writing as a life of faith.

So take one thing from her into your own ordinary days. Hold to what Allah has commanded even when it strains the people you love, and keep loving them anyway. Give one thing for His sake

that you expect never to get back. And do not give up on the person you have quietly stopped praying for. That is how the first daughter of the Prophet ﷺ lived, in patience, in sincerity, in a hope that outlasted twenty years of pain. May Allah be pleased with Zaynab, reunite us with those we love in faith, and gather us in the company of the household of His Messenger ﷺ.

This chapter follows the account of Zaynab bint Muhammad (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Lubaba bint al-Harith

The First Woman to Believe After Khadijah

There is a kind of person who lives at the center of a great story and is somehow never the one the story is told about. You find her name in the margins of other people's lives: the wife of this companion, the mother of that scholar, the sister of one of the Mothers of the Believers, the aunt of a famous general. Pull the thread of almost any early Muslim family and it runs, sooner or later, through her hands. And yet her own life, a remarkable life, is rarely given its due.

Her name was Lubaba bint al-Harith (may Allah be pleased with her), and once you learn to see her, you begin to see her everywhere.

The woman at the center of everyone's story

She came from a tribe called Banu Hilal, a Bedouin people known above all for the ability to survive. They were experts at wringing crops from hard ground, shepherds who kept cattle and camels alive through drought, masters of the rough conditions that broke other people. Families would send their children to live among Banu Hilal precisely so that they would learn how to endure. Some of the scholars say it was there that her own nephew, Khalid ibn al-Walid (may Allah be pleased with him), first learned the toughness that later made him what he was.

Lubaba came out of that world carrying its qualities. She was strong, she was courageous, and she had a presence that could fill a room, the kind that, as we will see, could put fear into the heart of a man like Abu Lahab. She is sometimes called Lubaba al-Hilaliyya, after her tribe, but she is better known by her honorific, Umm al-Fadl, after her eldest son.

To understand how completely she sat at the center of things, follow the family. Her full sister was Maymuna (may Allah be pleased with her), the last woman the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ married. Her half-sister Zaynab bint Khuzayma (may Allah be pleased with her), known for her charity, also married the Prophet ﷺ and died only months later in Madinah, one of just two of his wives to pass away in his lifetime, the other being Khadijah. So Lubaba was the sister-in-law of the Prophet ﷺ twice over, and the wife of his uncle al-Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) besides. Two more half-sisters, Asma and Salma bint Umays, were married among them to Jafar, Abu Bakr, Ali, and Hamza.

These were not ordinary women, and the Prophet ﷺ did not treat them as ordinary. He called Lubaba and her sisters al-Akhawat al-Mu'minat, the Faithful Sisters, a single name for women he honored for how early they came to faith and how steadily they supported him. Trace it all out and she is the in-law, in some fashion, of nearly every one of the rightly guided successors. Some of the scholars called her the most noble mother-in-law in the history of Islam; it is simpler, and truer, to call her the great aunt of the Muslim community.

A heart that recognized the truth at once

But the family tree, for all its grandeur, is not what she herself was proudest of. Lubaba held a distinction that outranked every

tie of blood and marriage. She was the first woman to enter Islam after Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her). She used to say she embraced Islam on the same day Khadijah did. The scholar al-Dhahabi records that it was said no woman accepted Islam before her except Khadijah, and Ibn Hajar notes that the only other woman who might possibly have preceded her was Fatima bint al-Khattab, the sister of Umar.

Think about what that means. She was married to al-Abbas, an uncle of the Prophet ﷺ close to him in age and in heart. She had known the Prophet ﷺ for years; she knew his character, loved and admired him, long before he carried any message. So when word reached the family that he had received revelation, she did not wait to weigh her options or watch how the wind would blow. She went straight to him and believed. Faith, for her, was not a calculation. It was recognition: when truth came to a man she had watched all those years, she knew it for what it was, the way you know a familiar voice in the dark.

Because of her closeness to Khadijah, and to the Prophet ﷺ through her husband, she became one of the few permitted to learn Islam both in his own home and in the house of al-Arqam, where the early believers gathered in secret. In a city where simply being seen near him could cost you everything, that access was rare. She used it; she learned at the source.

Steady in the lean years

Her son Abdullah ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with them both), the future scholar of this ummah, remembered his mother's faith from the inside. As long as he could remember, he said, his mother was openly declaring her Islam, and he described the two of them as being among the mustad'afin, the weak and vulnerable of Makkah who embraced Islam and

suffered for it. She was open where others had to hide. Abu Rafi, the freed servant of al-Abbas, also became Muslim, but he practiced in secret. Lubaba did not hide.

Her husband, meanwhile, held back. The historians disagree about when exactly al-Abbas embraced Islam, but all agree it was nowhere near as early as his wife. And so for years she lived a particular kind of patience: a believing woman in the house of a man who had not yet believed, praying for him. She used to make du'a that Allah would guide al-Abbas to Islam, and that he would abandon riba, the usury she hated long before a single verse forbade it. Al-Abbas was a wealthy merchant famous for the interest owed to him; that is why, years later, when the Prophet ﷺ abolished riba, he pointed first to the debts owed to his own uncle and declared them forgiven. There is something quietly stunning in that. Her fitra was already leaning toward what revelation would one day command. She hated the wrong before she was told it was wrong, and this is a mark of these early believers again and again: their hearts were aligned with the truth before the truth was spelled out for them.

Why was she so open and he so closed? Al-Abbas wanted to follow the example of his brother Abu Talib, who shielded the Prophet ﷺ out of family loyalty, as a noble uncle protects a nephew, without following his religion. He was a Hashimi before anything else, and so, while Lubaba grew more certain in her faith, her husband stood back, loyal but unconvinced.

This is the family that endured the boycott, when Quraysh cut off the Prophet's clan from food and trade and herded them into a barren valley to starve them into surrender. Its strain hastened the deaths of both Abu Talib and Khadijah, and Lubaba lived through all of it, watching Khadijah, whom she loved, weaken and

die. And it was in the middle of those very days, in the worst of the hardship, that she gave birth to Abdullah ibn Abbas. The scholar of this ummah was born during the boycott.

When he was born, she asked for the baby to be brought to the Prophet ﷺ for the tahnik, the gentle custom of softening a date and rubbing it on the roof of a newborn's mouth. But there were no dates; in the famine of the boycott there was no food to spare. So the Prophet ﷺ took from the moisture of his own mouth and placed it in the mouth of the infant, with nothing else. Mujahid said Abdullah is the only child known to have that distinction: nourished at his very first breath by the Prophet ﷺ himself, and some of the scholars say this is part of why he loved him so dearly. A blessing that arrives in the depth of hardship is a blessing you never forget. The Prophet ﷺ would later hold this child and pray for him to be given understanding of the religion. That is where it began, in a valley of hunger, with a mother who never stopped believing.

The pole, and the pride of Banu Hilal

Then came Badr. By this point the Prophet ﷺ had migrated to Madinah, and al-Abbas, still not openly Muslim, was made to march out with the Quraysh, though he had no wish to raise a hand against his nephew. The Prophet ﷺ knew his uncle's heart, and before the battle he named al-Abbas among the men dragged out against their will, instructing that such men be captured rather than killed. And so it happened. Al-Abbas never struck a blow, was taken prisoner, and was brought to the Prophet ﷺ, who could show him no favoritism: when he loosened his uncle's bonds, he ordered them loosened for every captive, and when he took ransom, he took it from al-Abbas too.

But before the prisoners reached Makkah, those who had fled the battle arrived first with the news. And here we are given one of the most vivid scenes in her life, narrated by Abu Rafi himself.

He was sitting in the room. Umm al-Fadl was there. And Abu Lahab, who had not gone to the battle, was pacing, anxious for word. When at last Abu Sufyan returned, Abu Lahab leapt up to question him. And Abu Sufyan, shaken, described a defeat: a Muslim force small in number but unmatched in courage, who killed and captured the Makkans as they pleased, fighting alongside enormous men the Quraysh could neither strike nor withstand. Hearing this, Abu Rafi, a vulnerable believer, could not contain his joy and blurted out, "By Allah, those were the angels."

Abu Lahab turned on him in fury, threw him down, and began to beat him bloody, a huge man pounding a defenseless one, enraged at the defeat and at the nerve of this servant celebrating it. Abu Rafi said he thought he might die under the blows.

And then Lubaba moved. She seized a tent pole, and she brought it down on Abu Lahab's head with all her strength, splitting his skull open so the blood ran down his face. She stood over him and said: Do you think you can overpower him just because his master is away? Do you think al-Abbas is gone, so you can do as you please? He is not yours to treat like this. She had struck him so hard that he could not rise.

Consider who this was. Abu Lahab, the one enemy of the Prophet ﷺ named alongside his punishment in the Qur'an itself, the man who had stood at the hill of Safa and hurled his curse at his own nephew. Allah answered him in a surah that every Muslim still recites:

May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined! May he be ruined too! Neither his wealth nor his gains will help him: he will burn in the Flaming Fire,

QUR'AN 111:1-3

And the wound that finished him came from the hand of this woman. The injury festered, and Abu Lahab died of it a few days later. The Banu Hilal in her had come out. This was not a woman afraid of anyone or anything.

Better than what was taken

When al-Abbas was told to ransom himself, he protested that he had no money. The Prophet ﷺ answered with something no one could have known: he asked about the wealth that al-Abbas and Umm al-Fadl had hidden away, the money he had secretly left with her in case he was killed. Al-Abbas said, "By Allah, I know that you are the Messenger of Allah, because this is something no one knew except Umm al-Fadl and myself." It was through a secret kept between husband and wife that the truth of prophethood was confirmed to him.

It was in this context that Allah revealed His word to the captives:

Prophet, tell those you have taken captive, 'If God knows of any good in your hearts, He will give you something better than what has been taken from you, and He will forgive you: God is forgiving and merciful.'

QUR'AN 8:70

Whatever you surrender for His sake, Allah will return to you greater, and forgive you besides. It is a promise that hangs over the whole of Lubaba's life, a woman who gave and prayed and waited for years.

And the waiting was long. Al-Abbas did not openly embrace Islam until nearly two decades after his wife, after the Treaty of Hdaybiyyah and shortly before the conquest of Makkah. Then at last the family moved to Madinah, to live near the Prophet ﷺ in the final years of his life. Around that same time he married her sister Maymuna, and the household held back for so long was gathered close.

In those last years her sons came into their own beside the Prophet ﷺ. For three years the young Abdullah shadowed him everywhere, and it was to this boy that the Prophet ﷺ, riding with him, said the famous words: be mindful of Allah and Allah will protect you, be mindful of Allah and you will find Him before you. He would watch his prayer in the depth of the night to teach it to the ummah. Her other son al-Fadl rode behind the Prophet ﷺ through much of the Farewell Pilgrimage, and a great many of our reports of that pilgrimage reach us through him. Two sons, raised by one mother, carrying the Prophet's example to every generation after.

The glass of milk, and a piece of the Prophet ﷺ

Lubaba was present at that Farewell Pilgrimage, and she gave us one of its most quietly brilliant moments. On the day of Arafah, under a punishing sun, the companions did not know whether they should be fasting. In Madinah they had fasted that day for years; now they watched the Prophet ﷺ stand with his hands raised in du'a, never lowering them, neither eating nor drinking. They were growing dehydrated and uncertain, and far too respectful to interrupt his supplication to ask.

Umm al-Fadl saw the scene and understood it. So she did something deft: she sent the Prophet ﷺ a cup of milk. If he

turned it away, they would have their answer; if he drank, they would have it too, without a single person breaking his concentration. He understood exactly what she was doing. He raised the cup so all could see it, and drank, and at once the people drank with him, knowing now that the pilgrim at Arafah does not fast that day. That was the vision of Lubaba: she read the moment and used her nearness to the Prophet ﷺ to free the people from their difficulty without anyone losing face.

There is one last connection, and it is the tenderest. Soon after the move to Madinah, Lubaba came to the Prophet ﷺ troubled by a dream that a piece of his flesh was in her house. He read it as glad tidings: Fatima would bear a child, and Umm al-Fadl, who had recently borne her own late son Quthum and still had milk, would nurse that child alongside her own. And so it came to pass. The child was al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with him), among the most beloved people in the world to the Prophet ﷺ, and Lubaba became his mother through nursing. The piece of the Prophet's flesh in her house was the grandson he called a part of himself.

A small story from those days carries a heavy shadow. Lubaba was once carrying the infant al-Husayn when the Prophet ﷺ took him to play, and the baby, as babies do, wet him, and when she gave the child a small smack for it he cried. The Prophet ﷺ said words that should stop the heart of anyone who knows what later happened to this child: you have hurt me by hurting my son. From this incident comes the famous ruling on the urine of a nursing boy, the report by which she is best known in the books of fiqh. But the words linger: if the Prophet ﷺ was wounded by a baby's tears over a gentle tap, the histories ask us to feel how he would have grieved what the people of a later year would do to that same grandson.

Lubaba narrated about thirty hadith from the Prophet ﷺ, carried onward by her son Abdullah, Anas ibn Malik, and others. She lived into the caliphate of Uthman, died in his days, and was buried in al-Baqi.

What Lubaba's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel only awe, to admire the strength that split Abu Lahab's skull and the cleverness that freed the pilgrims with a cup of milk, and then to close the book unchanged. That would be a waste. Her life is not an ornament; it is a question put to your own iman.

Start with how she believed. She did not wait for proof, for safety, for the crowd to move first. She had spent years watching a truthful man, and when the truth came she committed at once, openly, in a city that punished such things. This is the heart of faith: to trust Allah and His promise before the outcome is visible, to say "I believe" while it is still costly and not wait for it to become easy. Ask yourself honestly where you are still standing back, keeping your heart in reserve until belief looks safe. She gave hers first. You can too.

Look next at her patience inside her own home. For nearly twenty years she lived as a believer beside a husband who had not yet believed, and her response was not bitterness but du'a, year after year, for his guidance and for the wrong in his life to leave it. She did not despair of him, and she did not despair of Allah. If there is someone you have written off, a parent, a spouse, a friend who seems closed to good, her life asks you to keep asking Allah for them with the patience of a woman who waited two decades and was answered. The decree is in His hands, and your part is the asking.

See, too, how her fitra leaned toward the truth before she was commanded. She hated riba before a verse forbade it, the way a sound heart recoils from harm on its own. You have that same instinct, dulled or alive depending on how you feed it, and faith is partly the work of keeping it clean: leaving a wrong not because you have been forced to but because your heart can no longer sit with it.

And hold on to the promise underneath all of it, the one Allah gave to the captives of Badr: that what is taken from you for His sake, He returns to you better, and forgives you besides. Lubaba gave and waited for years. She buried Khadijah in the famine, bore her son in a valley of hunger, prayed into a silence that did not break for two decades, and none of it was lost. Her sons became lights of this ummah, her sister a Mother of the Believers, and she herself nursed a piece of the Prophet's own flesh. What looked like a woman quietly enduring on the edge of everyone else's story was in truth a life Allah was writing at its center. That is the promise that should change how you spend an ordinary day: what you give to Allah, He keeps, and gives back more.

So take one concrete thing from her into your own week. Make du'a, sincerely and repeatedly, for one person you have nearly given up on, the way she prayed for al-Abbas. Leave one wrong you have been tolerating, not because anyone is watching, but because your heart should no longer hold it. And when the truth is clear to you, act on it before it becomes convenient. That is how the first woman after Khadijah lived: in conviction, in patience, in a heart that ran toward the good. May Allah be pleased with Lubaba bint al-Harith, gather us with the Faithful Sisters she stood among, and grant us a measure of the faith that knew the truth at first sight.

This chapter follows the account of Lubaba bint al-Harith, Umm al-Fadl (RA), in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (8:70, 111:1-3). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Al-Arqam ibn Abi al-Arqam

The House of Islam

There is a kind of greatness that history almost forgets to record, because it never asks to be remembered. It works in the quiet. It carries the weight without ever stepping into the light. When the books of the Sahaba are opened, you will find long chapters on the men who spoke and fought and led, and then, almost in passing, you will find a young man whose own words were never written down, whose face was never described, and yet whose four walls held the entire future of this religion inside them for years. His name was al-Arqam ibn Abi al-Arqam (may Allah be pleased with him), and to understand him you have to understand that the safest place for the earliest Muslims on earth was a teenager's house, and that this was no accident.

A very young, very quiet believer

He was, by most accounts, somewhere between twelve and sixteen years old when he embraced Islam, and most of the narrations settle him at around fourteen. He was a teenager, barely come into his teens, in a city where the new faith was still being whispered behind closed doors. According to a narration recorded in al-Hakim, he was the seventh person to accept Islam, one of the very earliest souls to answer the call. The exact number is the kind of thing the historians debate, because Islam in those first years was preached in secret. Some kept their belief hidden, some accepted on the same day as another, and so the

order shifts from telling to telling. But the conclusion does not shift: al-Arqam was among the first, and he was a child when he chose.

We are not used to thinking of a fourteen-year-old as a pillar of anything. We should be careful, though, not to flatten the distance between his world and ours. A boy of fourteen in that society carried responsibilities that aged him quickly. He was not a child in the way our children are children. And still, even allowing for all of that, what stands out about al-Arqam is how silent he was. He does not seem to talk much, before or after, in Makkah or Madinah or anywhere along the way. He is one of those rare figures who passes through the whole story of the Prophet ﷺ as a presence rather than a voice. He listened. He stayed near. He gave what he had. And then he stepped back into the crowd. Part of the reason there is so little written about him is precisely this: he was a quiet young man who never sought to be written about.

For any young person who has ever felt too small or too unimportant to matter to the faith, the life of al-Arqam is a quiet rebuke to that feeling. He was the youngest kind of believer, and he held one of the most important roles of the entire Makkan period.

A house in exactly the right place

He inherited a home from his father, and that home sat in a place that no planner could have chosen better. It stood right beside Safa, which in those days was a far higher hill than the gentle rise pilgrims know today. Safa was where announcements were made; it was the very place the Prophet ﷺ would climb to deliver his first public call to his people. And the house of al-Arqam was tucked right beside it, with a narrow alleyway running between

Safa and his door, set close to the crowds and movement of Makkah. It was easy to slip into, easy to leave, easy to disappear from. To this day the spot is marked, near the mountain of Safa, and in time it would become a place where the Qur'an was taught, a small school, a site remembered by name.

In that house, the Prophet ﷺ gathered the young community that had begun to form around him. He would come there every day to teach them. He recited the Qur'an to a group of human beings for the first time within those walls. Some of the revelation itself came down in that home. It was there that Ammar ibn Yasir and Suhayb accepted Islam. It was there that Hamza accepted Islam, and there that Umar (may Allah be pleased with them) gave his allegiance. How many legends of this religion first said the words of faith under that one roof, and stood to pray behind the Prophet ﷺ for the first time inside the house of a teenage boy. It became known, simply and forever, as Dar al-Arqam, the House of Islam.

It was in this house, the histories tell us, that Allah revealed to His Prophet ﷺ a verse that would have settled the racing hearts of those frightened, hunted few:

Prophet, God is enough for you, and for the believers who follow you.

QUR'AN 8:64

Read that the way they would have heard it, crowded into a small room beside Safa, knowing that a sword might be waiting outside the door. It is enough for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ to have Allah on his side. And it is enough for those young, poor, persecuted believers to have Allah with them. Not numbers. Not power. Not safety. Allah. That was the lesson taught in the house of al-Arqam before it was ever taught anywhere else.

The boy from the tribe of the enemy

Here the choice of this house becomes something more than convenient. It becomes brilliant.

Most of the early Muslims came from the oppressed and the powerless: the Bilals, the Suhaybs, the Ammars, the Khabbabs, men with no clan to shield them and no rank to hide behind. Al-Arqam was not one of these. His father was Abu al-Arqam, of the line of Banu Makhzum, the tribe of Abu Jahl himself. Banu Makhzum was one of the most powerful houses in Makkah, and its leader was the very man rising to become the great tormentor of this religion, the one driving the persecution of those young believers, the one some would call the Pharaoh of this nation. Banu Makhzum was the bitter rival of Banu Hashim, the Prophet's own clan, and that rivalry was the root of much of Abu Jahl's hatred. He could not bear the thought of conceding a prophet to a competing tribe. To acknowledge the Prophet ﷺ was, in his mind, to bow to Banu Hashim forever.

And in the middle of that proud, hostile tribe walked a quiet teenager who had secretly become a Muslim. No one suspected him. He never announced his faith. He could move through the gatherings of Banu Makhzum unnoticed, a young man no one thought twice about, while sheltering the very man his tribe's leader had sworn to destroy. Some of the scholars saw in this an echo of an older story. Musa, peace be upon him, was raised and protected inside the house of Pharaoh, in the very household of the tyrant who hunted his people. And here was the Prophet ﷺ, raising a young nation inside the house of a youth from the tribe of the Pharaoh of his own age. Allah was protecting His Messenger and nurturing a generation of believers in the one place no enemy would think to look: the home of their enemy's own kin.

There was wisdom in it beyond concealment. Even if al-Arqam had been discovered, Abu Jahl was not about to make war on his own tribe. This was not like the Prophet ﷺ taking shelter among Banu Hashim, who could be, and were, boycotted as a clan. The resistance to the Prophet ﷺ was tribal at its core, and so it served the mission to be hidden inside Banu Makhzum, where the lines of loyalty made open violence costly even for Abu Jahl. The Prophet ﷺ saw all of this. The house was not chosen by chance. It was chosen with the eye of a leader who saw further than the men around him.

What the youth carried that the elders could not

The scholars who reflected on these years noticed something the Prophet ﷺ himself seemed to know from the start: that his greatest hope lay with the young. Again and again this shows. When he was driven out of Ta'if and stoned in its streets, he prayed that from the children of that town would come a generation that would worship Allah. When he looked at the people of Makkah who fought him, he placed his hope in their sons. And when those very sons, men like Ikrimah the son of Abu Jahl, and Khalid ibn al-Walid, first rose against him, he could still pray, "O Allah, forgive my people, for they do not know."

He had more hope in the youth because they were less set in their ways. They were not yet hardened into the loyalties of their fathers, not yet bound tightly to tribe and pride. Their innocence kept them nearer to the natural disposition Allah places in every soul. They were more willing to listen, more willing to be moved. And Allah rewarded the Prophet ﷺ for that hope: the children of his enemies, in Ta'if and in Makkah alike, became not merely Muslims but reasons for the spread of Islam. Al-Arqam was the first proof of this pattern. A teenager from Banu Makhzum

became a shelter for the Prophet ﷺ and his companions, when the elders of that same tribe were sharpening their knives.

The school that built a nation

Something was being formed in Dar al-Arqam that was larger than lessons. The Prophet ﷺ was not only accepting people's Islam there, not only teaching them the Qur'an and how to pray. He was building a community. He was nurturing a bond. In that small gathering, a scattered handful of believers became a body, an ummah in miniature, and Allah placed His blessing in that gathering place.

It is easy to romanticise it from a distance, so we should remember what it actually cost to walk through that door. Every time a believer entered, there was the chance of being discovered, tortured, killed for it. Every time a believer stepped out, there was the chance that someone stood waiting in the street with a sword or a spear. This is why, when Umar ibn al-Khattab came pounding on that door, the people inside thought their secret had finally been found out, that the end had come. And yet they kept returning. They built their faith in that danger, week after week, year after year, and Allah protected them and let their certainty grow.

There is a direct line from that house to something many believers know in their own lives. Think of how faith is so often cultivated, not in the great sermons before crowds, but in the small circles: the study group in someone's living room, the gathering in a corner of a masjid, a few people sitting together over the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet ﷺ, reflecting, remembering Allah, building a bond upon that shared certainty. Especially for those who live as a minority, surrounded by a world that does not share their faith, it is often these small gatherings,

far more than any public lecture, that forge a lasting Islamic identity and the strength to carry it into a hostile world. Anyone who has tasted that knows what it gives. People move on to bigger things and still say, years later, it was never quite the same as that small room, that camp, that circle where we remembered Allah together. When we sit in such gatherings today, studying the Qur'an, reflecting on the Seerah, holding one another up upon what is true, we are living the legacy of what the Prophet ﷺ built in the house of al-Arqam.

The man who gave without needing to be seen

When the Hijrah came, al-Arqam made it to Madinah with the Prophet ﷺ, in the year 622, alongside the other companions. There is a narration that the Prophet ﷺ granted him a house from the spoils, in an area of Madinah, a gesture that reads like a kind of loyalty returned, an acknowledgment of all this young man had given to Islam. And he did not stop giving. He fought in every battle at the side of the Prophet ﷺ: Badr, Uhud, Khandaq, not missing a single one. He lived through the era of all four of the Rightly Guided Caliphs and died much later, in the time of Mu'awiya (may Allah be pleased with him).

We have no hadith narrated from him. We have no record of his speech, no portrait of his manner. His presence in the story remains as subtle at its end as it was at its beginning. But consider what he chose to be. He had power. He had the privilege of belonging to one of the strongest tribes in Makkah, the protection of a name no one would touch. And he spent that privilege entirely on the Prophet ﷺ and his mission, without ever asking to be celebrated for it. He did not need to be counted among the famous or the noble. He was content to be anonymous in the streets of Makkah, walking unsuspected past

men like Abu Jahl, while he quietly gave the Messenger of Allah ﷺ a place to build a nation. His name is forever joined to that house, and that was enough for him.

There is one last detail, and it is the most tender thing we know about him. When he died, his one wish concerning that home was that it should never be sold. The boy who gave his house to Islam could never bring himself to let go of it. And one imagines what it must have meant to those who lived through it. Years after the secret meetings, the believers returned to Makkah in their thousands at the conquest of the city, and the Prophet ﷺ stood again upon Safa, the same hill from which he had once been rejected, now in complete victory. He could have glanced just to the right of that mountain, to a small house beside it, and known that this was where it began. That was the place where, in the years of fear, Allah had let them cultivate the certainty that carried them all the way here.

What al-Arqam's life asks of our faith

It is easy to admire a man like al-Arqam and leave it there, to file him away as a generous host and move on. That would be to miss what his life is actually asking of us. Because his story is not really about a house. It is about a heart that gave everything to Allah and asked for nothing in return, not even to be remembered.

Begin with that silence. Al-Arqam had every reason to make his sacrifice known. He could have been counted among the celebrated, the nobles, the firsts who are named in every gathering. He chose instead to disappear into the crowd, to do the work and let only Allah see it. This is ikhlas, sincerity, the rarest treasure a believer can carry: to act for Allah alone, content that He has witnessed the deed, even when no human being ever

will. Ask yourself honestly how much of your own good is done for the eyes of people, for the word of thanks, for the quiet hope of being seen. Then ask what you could do the way al-Arqam did it, in silence, expecting your reward only from Allah. There is a freedom in that kind of worship that those who chase recognition never taste.

Then look at what he did with what he had. He was given privilege, a strong tribe, a useful name, a house in the right place, and he understood that these were not his to enjoy but his to spend in the path of Allah. Every one of us has been given something: a home, a skill, time, money, a position, an influence over others, however small. The question his life puts to us is simple. What are you doing with yours? Are you holding it close, or are you opening your door, as he opened his, so that something good for Allah can happen inside it? You do not need to be famous to be useful. You do not need to lead to matter. A quiet believer in the back of the room, giving what he has without fanfare, can hold up a community the way al-Arqam held up the first one.

And take the lesson of the gathering itself into your week, because faith is not built alone. Al-Arqam's house teaches that certainty grows in the company of believers who remember Allah together. So make or keep one such circle. Sit with people who pull your heart toward your Lord. Study His Book, reflect on the life of His Prophet ﷺ, and let that small, blessed gathering become the place where your iman is fed and your commitment renewed, exactly as it was fed in that room beside Safa. In a world that constantly pulls faith apart, this is concrete, and it is within reach of anyone who wants it.

What looked, from the streets of Makkah, like a teenager risking his safety on a hunted man was in truth one of the most consequential lives of that entire age. Allah saw it all, and Allah does not forget what is given to Him. May Allah have mercy on al-Arqam and be pleased with him, and reward him for the house he gave and the faith he sheltered. May Allah grant him a high home in Paradise, the way he gave his home for the call to Paradise. And may Allah let us cultivate that same quiet certainty in our hearts, spend what we have been given for His sake alone, and gather us among the few, in the highest gardens, in the nearness of the Prophet ﷺ that the believers of Dar al-Arqam once knew.

This chapter follows the account of al-Arqam ibn Abi al-Arqam (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (8:64). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Suhayb ibn Sinan al-Rumi

The Forerunner of the Romans

There was a man in Makkah who looked like a stranger to everyone, and belonged, in the end, to the only One whose belonging matters. He was an Arab born among the Persians, kidnapped by the Romans, raised speaking Greek, and returned at last to his own people unable to speak their tongue without a foreign accent he would carry until the day he died. The world spent decades trying to decide what he was. Allah had already decided. He was a believer, and one of the first seven souls to declare it aloud in a city that hated the declaration.

His name was Suhayb ibn Sinan ibn Malik, remembered by history as Suhayb al-Rumi (may Allah be pleased with him), and his life is one long answer to a question most of us are afraid to ask: what do you actually have, if everything that defines you can be taken away?

The Arab who became a Roman

His father, Sinan ibn Malik, was an Arab of unusual intelligence and standing, so capable that the Persian emperor, the Kisra of his day, appointed him governor of a city named al-Ubulla, near what is now Basra. So Suhayb was born an Arab child in a Persian city, the son of an Arab governor serving a Persian throne. That alone was rare. Stranger still was how he looked: fair skin and fair hair, the look of a Roman child, though there was not

a drop of Roman blood in him. An Arab by lineage, a Persian by home, a Roman by appearance: the confusion of his identity was written on him before he could even speak.

He was barely five years old when the world that held him together came apart in a single afternoon. His mother had taken him out for a day near Nineveh, the old city of the Prophet Yunus, peace be upon him. While they were there, a raiding party of Roman soldiers fell upon the area and carried off a great number of captives. Among them was that fair-haired boy.

He was sold into slavery. His mother was sold to one master and taken away, and he never saw her again. He never saw his father again either. He himself passed from one owner to the next for nearly twenty years, a child growing into a man inside Roman slavery. Because he looked like them and lived among them, he learned Greek, and as he learned it he lost the Arabic he had been born to, until he had forgotten it completely. He knew, somewhere in him, that he came from the Arabs, but the knowing was an ache, not a home. He had belonged nowhere, and he longed for the one thing he had never been allowed: his own people, his own roots.

Escape to a city of refuge

So he ran. After two decades of being bought and sold, Suhayb seized a chance to escape and set his face toward the land of the Arabs, toward Makkah. The histories differ on why he chose that city. Some say he had heard the church-leaders of Syria speak of an awaited prophet who would rise in Makkah. Others say he chose it because Makkah was known across Arabia as a place of sanctuary, where a fleeing man could find asylum. Whichever it was, an Arab born in Persia and enslaved by Rome was now

slipping out of bondage and walking toward the one Arab city that promised safety.

When he arrived, he came under the protection of Abdullah ibn Jud'an, the wealthiest man in all of Makkah. The accounts differ on whether he was first purchased and then freed, or taken directly into protection as an ally. Either way it mattered enormously, for Ibn Jud'an was no ordinary man. He was the cousin of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, famous for both his wealth and his generosity to the poor. And it was in his house that the noble pact of al-Fudul had been sworn, the alliance of chivalry to defend the wronged, the very pact the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had joined as its youngest member before revelation came.

Suhayb's charisma made him beloved to this man. Ibn Jud'an taught him trade, made him his representative in the marketplace, and Suhayb proved sharp, quick to read a deal and close it. In time he grew wealthy in his own right. But his wealth rested on a hidden fault line. Suhayb had no tribe in Makkah, and in that society a man's safety came from his clan. His only protection was Abdullah ibn Jud'an. As long as that man lived, his fortune was safe. When he died, Suhayb would be simply a rich and friendless foreigner, the first man anyone would rob if the order of the city ever broke.

And his foreignness never left him. Even decades later, settled among his own people, Suhayb spoke Arabic with a Roman accent until the day he died, which is why he carried the name al-Rumi to the end. Allah, it seems, wanted it understood that this man's worth had nothing to do with where he was from.

Two strangers at the same door

Suhayb had known the Prophet ﷺ before revelation came, by his own testimony, either through the house of Ibn Jud'an or through trade, for both men were merchants, and he had seen his character up close. He had also seen a great deal of religion in his life: the fire-worship of Persia, the Christianity of Rome, the idolatry of the Arabs. He had seen them all, and clung to none. He was a man waiting, without quite knowing what for.

Then the murmurs began. Suhayb, sharp and perceptive in the marketplace, caught the news before most of Makkah had heard it: that Muhammad ﷺ was quietly gathering a small group in the house of al-Arqam to teach them a new faith. The scene of what happened next is narrated by another of the great early believers, Ammar ibn Yasir (may Allah be pleased with him), the son of Sumayya and Yasir. Ammar arrived at the door of al-Arqam, and at that very same moment Suhayb arrived too. Two men, drawn by the same rumor, at the same threshold.

Each was wary of the other. Ammar asked, "What do you want here?" And Suhayb answered, "What do *you* want here?" Then Ammar admitted it: "I want to go in to Muhammad ﷺ and hear what he has to say." And Suhayb said, "I am here for exactly the same reason." So they knocked together, went in together, and the Prophet ﷺ presented Islam to them, and they accepted it in the same hour, side by side. Two outsiders, an Arab raised by Romans and the son of an enslaved woman, became Muslims at the same moment, their fates bound together for the rest of their lives.

Fair game

The powerful of Makkah were tortured in private, by their own clans, to spare the tribe its shame. Suhayb had no such shield. Abdullah ibn Jud'an was dead. He had no master, no clan, no

protector. He was, in the cold phrase of the time, fair game, and a tempting target, because to attack him was to open the door to his wealth. Yet he did not hide his faith. He was among the very first to make his Islam public, in a city turning violent against exactly that. Any of the elites could pluck him from the streets on any given day and torture him as long as they pleased, and no one would say a word in his defense.

The histories place him beside Bilal, Khabbab, and Ammar in those years. The narrations say that Ammar and Suhayb were tortured until they no longer knew what they were saying, beaten and starved and left in the sun until they lost track of their surroundings. These were the ones the chiefs of Quraysh sneered at when they told the Prophet ﷺ to drive away "this lot," the lowly ones. Suhayb was counted low, not for poverty, for he was rich, but because he had no tribe: discarded as worthless because he could not name a clan.

And yet, in the sight of the One who sees what the eye misses, Suhayb stood among the foremost of humanity. There is a narration in which the Prophet ﷺ said that the forerunners are four: "I am the forerunner of the Arabs, Suhayb the forerunner of the Romans, Bilal the forerunner of the Abyssinians, and Salman the forerunner of the Persians." Four men, four corners of the known world, and Suhayb, the Arab whom everyone took for a Roman, was named the first-fruits of Rome. The city called him low. Heaven called him a forerunner.

The most profitable transaction

When the time of the Hijra came, every Muslim who intended to migrate had gone. Suhayb was the only one left. Quraysh had chained him and set guards on him around the clock. There was no clean way to release him, and he simply remained, watched

day and night, while the others slipped away to Madinah. He had hoped to travel as the third man alongside the Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr, but Quraysh blocked him, intending to forbid him the Hijra altogether.

So Suhayb, sharp as ever, made a plan. One night he pretended to be ill with his stomach, standing up and sitting down, asking again and again to go out and relieve himself, until his guards grew sick of watching him and lost track of him. The moment they did, he was gone, riding hard toward Madinah. By the time they realized, he had reached the outskirts of the city. They caught up to him, and found him on a hill with his bow drawn.

"O Quraysh," he called down, "you know that I am among the best archers among you. By Allah, I will plant every one of these arrows in you before you reach me." He was a marksman, and he meant it. So they bargained. You came to us with nothing and grew rich on our soil, they shouted, and now you think we will let you walk away with all of it? And there it was, the truth of what they wanted. Not him. His money.

So Suhayb offered them the only thing that would set him free. "I will leave Makkah just as I came to it," he said, and he told them exactly where every hidden store of his wealth lay, the fortune of decades. The condition was simple: take it all, and let me go to Madinah. They agreed, and Suhayb rode away as empty-handed as the five-year-old slave once dragged into the world of buying and selling.

Many of the commentators say it was about this moment that a verse of the Qur'an was revealed, though some place it after the torture of Bilal:

But there is also a kind of man who gives his life away to please God, and God is most compassionate to His servants.

QUR'AN 2:207

Suhayb reached Quba, sick and exhausted, with nothing in his hands. The Prophet ﷺ saw him coming, alone, stripped of his wealth, and before he could even speak, said it three times: "What a profitable transaction, Abu Yahya. What a profitable transaction. What a profitable transaction." It was the same word the Ansar had used when they pledged themselves to him and he promised them nothing in this world, only Paradise. Suhayb had handed Quraysh a fortune and walked away with empty pockets, and Heaven called it the best deal he ever struck.

Beloved of Umar, and the dates eaten sideways

Suhayb arrived at Quba around the same time as Ali, who had walked the whole way on foot, his feet torn and blistered, after sleeping in the Prophet's bed to discharge his trusts. So Suhayb was among the last to arrive. And the first thing the histories record of him in Madinah is, of all things, laughter. He came starving and sick, his eyes red and inflamed, one of them nearly swollen shut. The Prophet ﷺ had bread and dates before him and called him to eat, and Suhayb fell on the food ravenously, forgetting himself. Umar ibn al-Khattab remarked: look how Suhayb devours the dates even though his eye is inflamed. The Prophet ﷺ turned to him: you are eating dates with that inflammation in your eye? And Suhayb, quick-witted as ever, answered that he was chewing on the side of the *good* eye. And the Prophet ﷺ smiled a wide smile. In that exchange you can already see the bond forming between Suhayb and Umar, which would last to the end of Umar's life.

Suhayb said of his years in Madinah that there was not a single battle the Prophet ﷺ fought except that he was there, before him or behind him, on his right or his left. He had given his wealth for this religion, and now his body too. And he held a particular closeness to Umar, the man whose tribal pride had once defined him and whom Islam had remade entirely.

How completely Umar was remade shows at the very end of his life. When Umar was stabbed and lay dying, with all the great companions around him, it was Suhayb he appointed to lead the Muslims in prayer until the council could settle on a successor. Think of what that meant. A man with a foreign accent, no Makkan tribe, an outsider in look and speech, set at the front of the believers to lead the prayer over the heads of the noblest of the Quraysh. The tribal world Umar had been born into would have found it unthinkable. The faith that transformed him made it natural. And as Umar lay wounded, Suhayb wept over him and cried, "Wa akhah! Wa akhah!", "O my brother, my brother." Not Commander of the Believers. Brother. The love in that one word tells the whole story of what Islam had built between two men who, by birth, shared nothing at all. And it was Suhayb who climbed into the grave to receive Umar's body and lay it beside the Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr: an immense honor, given by Allah to the Arab whom Makkah had once thrown away.

His friend Ammar once teased that he found no fault in him except three things: he kept the nickname Abu Yahya though he had no son named Yahya, he claimed to be an Arab though he looked a Roman, and he bought too much food. Suhayb answered each. The Prophet ﷺ himself had given him the nickname. His father truly was an Arab, a governor among the Persians before he was taken. And he bought much food because he had heard the Prophet ﷺ say, "The best of you are

those who feed others." Even his only flaw, looked at closely, was a sunnah. He lived on into the caliphate of Uthman, and when civil strife broke out among the Muslims he wanted no part of it; he took to the hills with his sheep and died, despite his lofty rank, in relative obscurity.

What Suhayb's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a story like Suhayb's as a great adventure, a man tossed across three empires who landed, against all odds, in Paradise. But adventure is not what his life asks of us. It asks something harder, and quieter.

Suhayb spent his whole life having his identity defined by others. The Persians saw an Arab outsider. The Romans saw a slave to be sold. The Arabs of Makkah saw a tribeless foreigner with a strange accent, low enough to discard. Every group he passed through measured him by what he was not. And through all of it, Suhayb came to rest his worth on the only verdict that does not change: that Allah had chosen him, named him a forerunner, and called his greatest loss his greatest profit. This is the first thing his life puts to your iman. You too will be measured, by your background, your wealth or lack of it, your usefulness to people who will discard you when you stop being useful. His life asks whether you can let all of that fall away and stand on the one belonging that holds: that you are a servant of Allah, and He sees you. When the world tells you that you are nothing, answer the way Heaven answered for Suhayb.

Then there is the transaction. "What a profitable transaction" is the lens Allah wants you to hold over your own choices: the hour of sleep you give up to pray, the money you give away that you could have kept, the desire you walk away from for His sake. It does not feel like profit in the moment; it feels like loss, like a man

riding out of the only city he knows with empty pockets. But this is the bargain of the believer, and the only bargain that pays. Ask what you are clutching that you are afraid to spend for Allah, then remember a man who spent it all and was told, three times, that he had won. And he gave in silence, telling no one, content that Allah had seen it. That is ikhlas, the sincerity that does the deed for Allah alone. How much of what you do is done for the eyes of people, and how much could you do the way he did, quietly, for your Lord?

And remember what he chose to carry forward. Of the few hadiths Suhayb narrated, one is among the most beloved words the Prophet ﷺ ever spoke: "How wonderful is the affair of the believer, for all his affairs are good. If good comes to him, he is grateful, and that is good for him. And if hardship strikes him, he is patient, and that is good for him." Think of who is carrying these words: a man stolen at five, enslaved for twenty years, tortured into incoherence, robbed of his fortune as the price of his freedom. He of all people had the right to call life cruel, and instead he handed us the secret that for the believer there is no losing position: gratitude in ease, patience in hardship, and Allah's good pleasure in both. That is rida, contentment with the decree of Allah, which turns even theft and exile into gain. Your life will hand you both kinds of days, and his life asks whether you will meet them with a heart that has already decided that whatever Allah sends is good for it.

And his life answers the fear that quietly haunts us, that giving to Allah is a loss we will regret. The world saw a sick man arriving in Quba with empty hands. Heaven saw the most successful man alive. What you give to Allah, He keeps. What you suffer for Him, He sees. What the world calls loss, He may be recording as the very thing that saves you.

He narrated, too, the verse about those who do good:

Those who did well will have the best reward and more besides. Neither darkness nor shame will cover their faces: these are the companions in Paradise, and there they will remain.

QUR'AN 10:26

The Prophet ﷺ explained the "more besides": when the people of Paradise have entered it, the veil will be lifted and they will look upon their Lord, and he swore that Allah will give them nothing more beloved than the sight of His face. Suhayb, who never had a home he could keep, carried to us the promise of the only homecoming that lasts: to look, at last, upon the One he gave everything for.

So take one thing from this stranger into your own settled life. When the world measures you and finds you wanting, refuse its verdict and rest on Allah's. When you are asked to give something up for His sake, call it what the Prophet ﷺ called it: a profitable transaction. And when hardship comes, meet it as Suhayb did, with patience, knowing it is good for you. May Allah be pleased with Suhayb al-Rumi, the forerunner of the Romans, the man who lost the whole world and gained his Lord, and may He gather us with him in the gardens where the veil is lifted and the faces shine.

This chapter follows the account of Suhayb ibn Sinan al-Rumi (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2:207, 10:26).

Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Bilal ibn Rabah

The Voice of Certainty

There is a single word at the center of this man's life, and once you hear it you will never separate it from him. He said it under torture. He said it with a stone crushing his chest. He said it from the roof of the Kaaba on the day his city fell to the truth. One word, repeated until it became his whole self: Ahad. One. Allah is One.

His name was Bilal ibn Rabah (may Allah be pleased with him), and to feel the weight of that word, you have to begin where he began, at the very bottom of the only world he had ever known.

Born between two surahs

Bilal's story, in a strange and beautiful way, is held between two chapters of the Qur'an: it opens with the surah of the Elephant and closes with the surah of the Help.

An Abyssinian general from Yemen, the man the histories call Abraha, once marched an army to destroy the Kaaba, and Allah destroyed that army instead. Among the captives swept into that aftermath was an Abyssinian princess named Hamamah, taken into slavery and married to Rabah, a black Arab who was himself a slave. From that union, roughly ten years after the Year of the Elephant, in about the year 580, a boy was born in Makkah, the child of two enslaved parents, in a city that measured a person's worth by his tribe.

He grew into a strong and striking man, with very dark skin, hazel eyes, and hair that never thinned with age. None of it mattered to the people who owned him, because in their eyes he was first and last the son of a black woman, and that, they decided, fixed his place beneath them. Even though his father was an Arab, it was his mother's enslavement that defined him. And it is said that the boy who would become the muadhin of the Prophet ﷺ grew up watching his own mother beaten, helpless to stop it. Carry that image with you: a child who could not protect the one he loved most, inside a system that called this normal.

Bilal was intelligent and capable, and so he rose, as far as a slave could rise, into the ranks of the favored, owned eventually by a nobleman of Quraysh, Umayyah ibn Khalaf. But favored or not, he was a slave, and his society would never let him be anything else. He had been born at the bottom of a false order propped up by idols and the men who profited from them.

The word that resonated

When the message of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ began to move quietly through Makkah, it reached Bilal, and it reached him fast. It seems he may not have heard it from the Prophet ﷺ directly; his master, Umayyah, was a custodian of the Kaaba who perfumed the idols, and Bilal may well have first heard of Islam from Umayyah's own complaints about the very man the message announced. It does not matter how the word reached him, only what it did when it arrived.

It is tempting to imagine that what drew a slave to Islam was its promise of justice, its leveling of the proud. That is real, but it is not the first thing, and the order matters. The first thing that reached Bilal's heart was tawhid, the oneness of God. Ahad. One. All the dignity and all the justice flowed out of that one truth like

water from a single spring, because if God is truly One, then no man is a god over another, and the whole machinery that had crushed Bilal and his mother is exposed as a lie. Tawhid places all of humanity on a single plane, the slave and the nobleman level before the Lord who made them both.

This is why Bilal clung to that one word above all others, and he would repeat it for the rest of his life. He was among the first seven to declare their Islam openly, and he had no clan, no powerful father, no one to shield him from what came next.

Ahad, Ahad

Umayyah wanted to make an example of him. A favored slave turning to this new religion was a threat, and the lesson had to be public so that no one else would follow. So the torture began.

He put an iron collar on Bilal and pressed hot iron against him until he lost consciousness. He staked him out in the open desert from sunrise to sunset, day after day, withholding water, and to torment his mind as much as his body they would let a few drops fall onto his chest where he could see them. Bilal went days like this, without food, without water, under a sun meant to break him.

And Umayyah did not even ask for much. He was not Abu Jahl demanding that Sumayyah curse the Prophet ﷺ. He thought himself generous; he only wanted Bilal to say the names of the idols, and all of this would end.

Bilal's answer never changed. Ahad, Ahad. One, One.

It infuriated Umayyah, who felt his easy escape was being refused, and the cruelty climbed. He handed Bilal to the reckless youths of Taif to assault as they pleased, for days. When that failed, they dragged him through the streets, leaving streaks of

his blood on the paths, and still the only sound from him was that one word. One, One.

Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (may Allah be pleased with him) said that when the believers were tortured most severely, the only one who never showed his pain was Bilal. He had emptied himself of himself for the sake of Allah. The histories connect his struggle to a verse the believers carried close, about the kind of person who has nothing left to give but his own life, and gives it:

But there is also a kind of man who gives his life away to please God, and God is most compassionate to His servants.

QUR'AN 2:207

The scholars noticed a quiet symmetry here. Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) spent his wealth to free the enslaved, and this verse is about the other side, those who had no wealth to give at all. Bilal could not buy anyone's freedom, including his own. He could only offer his body to the sun and the stone, a price worth paying to belong to Allah.

Then came the last and worst of it. Umayyah had Bilal stretched out on the burning ground, already dehydrated, already starved, already beaten past what most could survive, and ordered men to bring a stone so heavy it took several of them to carry, and lay it upon his chest. And Bilal, pinned beneath it, said Ahad, Ahad until he lost consciousness.

The story could have ended there, a martyr like Sumayyah before him. But Abu Bakr kept coming, day after day, pressing Umayyah to sell. Umayyah wanted to win; victory, to him, meant watching Bilal crumble, and Bilal would not crumble. At last, seeing that this man would never surrender his faith, and loving money above all,

Umayyah named a price. Ten uqiyahs, no small sum. Abu Bakr did not bargain. He paid it at once.

And then Umayyah, unable to resist one final twist of the knife, said: if you had only offered me a single dinar, I would have sold him to you. He wanted to tell Bilal, even now, that he was worth almost nothing. Abu Bakr's reply is one of the most beautiful in the story. By God, he said, if you had asked for a hundred, I would have paid it.

Hear what that meant to a man told his whole life that he was cheap. He was joining a people who valued him not in spite of his faith but because of it, who priced him by his love for Allah and nothing else on earth.

The voice on the rooftop

The leaders of Quraysh would later offer to sit and listen if only the Prophet ﷺ would drive away the poor and the formerly enslaved, men like Bilal, whose presence offended their pride. Allah answered them with a command that fixed Bilal's place forever:

Do not drive away those who call upon their Lord morning and evening, seeking nothing but His Face. You are in no way accountable for them, nor they for you; if you drove the believers away, you would become one of the evildoers.

QUR'AN 6:52

From the day he walked free, Bilal's life simply orbited the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He was at his side in every journey and every battle. When the Prophet ﷺ wished to be alone, Bilal was the one he allowed near; when he prepared to travel, Bilal was

the first to know. He guarded him, woke him for Fajr, and held the door between the people and the Prophet ﷺ.

When the call to prayer was finally established, after the dream of the adhan was shown to Abdullah ibn Zayd and to Umar (may Allah be pleased with them both) on the same night, the Prophet ﷺ chose Bilal to raise that first call. He was not chosen because his race made him a useful symbol. He was chosen because he had earned it. The man who would stand atop the mosque and proclaim that there is no god but Allah was the same man who had proclaimed it under the rock, in chains, with the sun on his face. His certainty won him the honor, and nothing about his past was allowed to stand in the way.

Picture the access this gave him. Five times a day, Bilal would come and say, the prayer, O Messenger of Allah, and the Prophet ﷺ would answer with words that should make every heart ache: comfort us with it, O Bilal. Then Bilal would call out Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar, and as his voice reached the testimony that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, the Prophet ﷺ himself would walk out to lead the people.

Once, after Bilal fell silent at the end of the adhan, the Prophet ﷺ said that whoever says this with certainty will enter Paradise. There is a window into Bilal's soul in that. When he called out Allahu Akbar, God is greater, how much certainty stood behind it, from the man who had proven that witness with his own blood?

He became more than the muadhin: the confidant of the Prophet ﷺ, a fighter at his side, and the first treasurer of the young community.

The day of reckoning, and the day of triumph

At Badr, the past came walking onto the battlefield. Umayyah ibn Khalaf, the man who had tortured Bilal for years, had not even wanted to come; Abu Jahl had shamed him into marching out. On the field he sought protection from an old friend among the Muslims, Abdur-Rahman ibn Awf (may Allah be pleased with him), who took him captive hoping to ransom him.

Then Bilal saw him.

Try to hold what must have moved through Bilal in that instant: the man who staked him in the sun, who laid the stone on his chest, who let the youths of Taif do their worst, now within reach. Bilal cried out: I will not live if he lives. One of us dies today. Abdur-Rahman, who narrated this himself, found himself shielding his prisoner while Bilal and a group of the Ansar struck at Umayyah, trying to reach past him. And there, that day, Bilal took his justice. Umayyah was killed, and years of humiliation met their reckoning in this life before the next. There is a gentle turn in it, too: Bilal would later marry Abdur-Rahman's sister, and the two became family.

But if Badr was the day of reckoning, the conquest of Makkah was the day of Bilal. The Prophet ﷺ entered the Kaaba and cast out the idols in whose name Bilal had been broken, and then told Bilal to climb to the top of the Kaaba and call the adhan.

Stop and see it. In the same city where he was once pinned beneath a stone gasping Ahad, Ahad, Bilal now rises above the holiest house on earth to call out Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar. Some scholars said that this, more than the smashing of the idols, was the hardest thing for the proud of Quraysh to bear, because the idols had given them power and standing, and now a freed slave stood above it all, the whole false order in pieces beneath his feet.

The comments came, even from some who had just entered Islam. One sneered about a black slave climbing the Kaaba. Another called him a crow. Abu Sufyan held his tongue, saying he feared the very sky would testify against him if he spoke. And some scholars hold that here Allah revealed the verse that buries every such sneer forever:

People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one another. In God's eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware.

QUR'AN 49:13

That same day, one more scene fixed Bilal's place in the religion. Bilal, Ammar, and Suhayb passed by Abu Sufyan, newly Muslim but long their enemy, and said that the swords of Allah had not yet reached the necks of His enemies as they should have. Stung, Abu Sufyan complained to Abu Bakr, who, anxious to bind the community's wounds, rebuked the three for speaking so to a chief of Quraysh, then told the Prophet ﷺ. And the Prophet ﷺ said: O Abu Bakr, perhaps you have angered them. If you have angered them, you have angered your Lord. Abu Bakr, the truthful, went straight back to the three and begged their forgiveness, and they gave it freely. The Prophet ﷺ did not trade away these early believers to soothe a former enemy. He had honored Bilal when Bilal had nothing, and he honored him still.

What grief, and then what joy

Bilal's entire life revolved around the Prophet ﷺ, and now the Prophet ﷺ was dying. Watching the fever take him, Bilal said, what grief is mine, if only I had died before this day.

When the Messenger of Allah ﷺ passed away, Bilal stood to call the adhan as he always had. But this time, when he reached the name of Muhammad ﷺ, he broke. He tried again, and again, and could not get the words out, and all of Madinah wept with him as he struggled to bear witness to the Messenger who was no longer there to walk out into the light. He came down and said he would never call the adhan for anyone again. Everywhere he looked in the city he saw the Prophet ﷺ, and he could not stay.

He went to Abu Bakr with words that cut to the bone. If you freed me for Allah, he said, then let me go where I wish; and if you freed me for yourself, then keep me and do with me as you will. Abu Bakr said, of course I freed you for Allah. Go. And Bilal went out to Syria.

The next time his voice was heard among them was in Jerusalem. When al-Quds was opened, Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) pressed Bilal, again and again, to call the adhan one more time, the way he used to in Madinah. At last Bilal stood in Masjid al-Aqsa and called it, becoming the first to call the adhan in all three of the holiest places: Madinah, then Makkah, and now al-Quds. And when his voice rose, the companions wept, carried back to the days of the Prophet ﷺ. He called it only once more, in Madinah, at the request of al-Hasan and al-Husayn (may Allah be pleased with them both).

Bilal died in Syria around the year 639, most accounts say in the great plague that took so many of the companions. As he lay dying, his wife cried out, what grief, what tragedy, the same word Bilal had once spoken over the Prophet ﷺ. But Bilal corrected her. Say instead, he told her, what joy. Tomorrow I meet my loved ones, Muhammad ﷺ and his companions. The man who had longed his whole life for that presence was finally going to it.

The Prophet ﷺ had once said he heard the footsteps of Bilal ahead of him in Paradise, and asked what deed he most hoped in. Bilal answered that he knew of nothing he hoped in more than this: that he never made wudu, by night or by day, without praying two rakahs with that purification. The Prophet ﷺ also called him the leader of the muadhins on the Day of Judgment, the one the callers will follow until they enter Paradise. And Abdullah ibn Umar named his own son Bilal; when a poet praised that son as the best of all the Bilals, he corrected him at once: no, the Bilal of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ is the best of all the Bilals.

What Bilal's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel only awe, to set Bilal so far above us that he asks nothing of us. His life is not a monument to admire from a distance; it is a question pressed against your own iman.

Begin with the word itself. Ahad. One. Years later Umar asked Bilal why, under all that torture, he only ever said Ahad, Ahad, and Bilal answered that if he had known any other word about Allah, he would have said it. He had no list of names, no memorized supplications, no learning to lean on. He had one truth, held with total certainty, and it was enough to carry him through fire. This is the first thing his life asks of you: not how much you know about Allah, but how certain you are of the little you do know. A great deal of shallow knowledge will not hold a person up when the stone comes down; one truth, believed with the whole heart, will. Tend your certainty in the One God the way you would tend a flame in the wind, because it is what will still be standing when everything else is gone.

Then there is his sincerity. Bilal gave his body to the sun and the stone for the sake of Allah alone. There was no audience, no

reward in this world coming to a tortured slave; he refused to sell the truth for relief, because the truth belonged to Allah and so did he. That is ikhlas, the rarest thing: to do the deed for Allah and be content that He has seen it, even when no one else ever will. Ask yourself how much of what you call faith would survive if no one were watching. Bilal's would.

And see what Allah did with that. The world told Bilal he was worth a single dinar, and Allah set him atop the Kaaba and made his voice the call that gathers the ummah to prayer until the end of time. The world buried his mother in slavery, and Allah made her son the leader of the muadhins in Paradise. Every drop of withheld water, every lash, every hour under the stone, Allah recorded and repaid beyond anything the streets of Makkah could imagine. This is the promise that should reorder how you live. What you give to Allah, He keeps. What you suffer for Him, He sees. What the proud step over, He may be raising to the rooftop.

So take something small and real from him into an ordinary day. When you are wronged and no one will defend you, hold to your trust in Allah the way Bilal held to his one word. When you can do a good deed in secret, do it for Allah alone and let it stay hidden, the way Bilal prayed two rakahs after every wudu in the quiet of his nights. And when hardship presses on your chest, train your tongue to say what he said: not what grief, but tomorrow I meet my Beloved. May Allah be pleased with Bilal ibn Rabah, let us hear his voice and his footsteps on the Day of Judgment, and gather us behind his standard into the presence of the Prophet ﷺ, the one he loved, and the One who is Ahad, forever One.

This chapter follows the account of Bilal ibn Rabah (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an

*translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2:207, 6:52, 49:13).
Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most
widely reported has been followed.*

Khabbab ibn al-Aratt

The First to Be Tortured for His Faith

There are some names that never seem to stand on their own. When we speak of the poor and the vulnerable who entered Islam in its first dangerous days, we recite a short list almost as a single breath: Bilal, Suhayb, Sumayyah and her family, and a handful of others (may Allah be pleased with them all). The names run together, and in running together they blur, and something is lost. We stop seeing the individual soul behind each one. We forget that every name belonged to a real person who made a real choice, alone, with nothing in this world to gain by it.

This is the story of one of those blurred names. A young man, an enslaved boy who became a master craftsman, who according to some of the scholars of seerah was the first person to make his Islam public, and the first person ever to be tortured for it. His name was Khabbab ibn al-Aratt (may Allah be pleased with him), and his life is one long answer to a single question: what would you endure, and for whose sake?

A boy in the slave market

To understand him, you have to begin where his masters could see him but no one knew him: in the slave market of Makkah, the same market from which Zayd ibn Harithah was once bought, where so many of the famous moments of the seerah quietly took shape.

He was not yet even a teenager. An enslaved boy, standing among other enslaved boys, when a woman named Umm Anmar walked through looking for a purchase. She was not only after someone to carry her chores. She wanted a boy she could train into a trade, someone who would earn money for her for years to come. So she studied the faces, and one of them stopped her. This particular boy had clear signs of intelligence in his eyes, a look of strength, something distinguished in his bearing. She pointed: that one.

She bought him and began walking him home, and on the way she asked his name. Khabbab, he said. And your father? Al-Aratt. And where are you from? From Najd, he answered. She had assumed, seeing that he was black, that he must be Abyssinian, one of the enslaved brought over from al-Habashah. But he told her plainly that he was an Arab, from the tribe of Banu Tamim. He would become the most distinguished companion to come from that tribe.

How, then, she asked, did an Arab boy end up among the slave traders of Makkah? And he described what he had lived. As a child, two Arab tribes had gone to war, his own and another. His tribe lost. The victors took the livestock, the women, the children, and killed the men. He was among the children carried off. From that day, all he had ever known was slavery, passed from master to master, traded from place to place. A childhood with no memory in it that was not a memory of bondage.

Recognising that the boy was special, Umm Anmar apprenticed him to a blacksmith in Makkah to learn a precise and valuable craft: the making of swords. He did not merely learn it. He surpassed his teacher. He became an expert swordsmith, famous for it, with his own workshop. If you lived in Makkah and needed

a sword made or sharpened, you came to Khabbab. He was known for his skill, and for his integrity and good character besides.

And yet none of it was his. He was building a reputation that could buy him nothing. Every talent he sharpened was sharpened for the profit of his owner. He had no wealth, no protection, no future that the world of pre-Islamic Makkah would ever allow him to claim. He was a man perfecting an art that only deepened his chains.

He did not wait

Then he heard of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and his call.

It is striking that the books do not preserve the exact moment Khabbab met the Prophet ﷺ, nor who pointed him toward that house. But what they do tell us is far more telling. He is counted among the very first to accept Islam, some say the sixth, some the seventh or eighth, but always among the first ten. And the reason he comes so early is this: when word of the message reached him, while the Prophet ﷺ was still calling people privately, Khabbab did not wait. He did not wait for the nobles to debate it. He did not wait for the news to spread, or for it to become safe, or even to become common among the weak and the downtrodden like himself. He went straight to the Prophet ﷺ.

The call to the oneness of Allah, to tawhid, to the rejection of the idols and everything those idols stood for, including the whole system that let a boy be stolen and sold and used: it simply made sense to him. It clicked. It was his fitrah. This was not a learned theologian weighing arguments. This was a man whose pure nature recognised the truth the instant it was spoken. He came to the Prophet ﷺ and said, in effect, extend your hand, I want to

give you my pledge, before any of this has had a chance to spread. And he gave his allegiance, and he rejected the idols, and he embraced the religion of Muhammad ﷺ.

Then he did the thing that would cost him his flesh: he told people. He hid it from no one. The young man famous for crafting the swords of the nobles of Quraysh, the man with no clan and no protection in all of society, began saying openly and freely that he had believed.

Iron on his skin

Word travels fast about a person no one is afraid to harm.

When Umm Anmar heard, she summoned her brother, Siba ibn Abdullah, and told him what she had heard. She sent him to confirm it, and to bring some of the young men of Quraysh with him to deal with Khabbab if it proved true. Siba gathered the group and went to the workshop, where Khabbab was doing what he always did, making swords, except that now he made them as a believer.

Siba spoke first with mock disbelief. We heard something about you that cannot possibly be true, he said. We heard you have abandoned your religion and now follow the man of Banu Hashim. They would not even say the Prophet's name. And Khabbab's answer carried a quiet dignity that is easy to miss. He did not let them name him by what they imagined he had left. I have not abandoned anything, he said. I have believed in Allah, and I have rejected your idols, and I believe that Muhammad ﷺ is the servant and messenger of Allah. There is something in that reply worth pausing over: who told you my religion was ever yours? I am a slave in your eyes, you have never valued my

thoughts, and now, suddenly, you are concerned with what I believe.

The moment the words left his mouth, they fell on him. They beat him until he was unconscious. They picked up the iron bars he used in his own craft and struck his head with them, and he was left lying in the street of Makkah, blood running from his wounds, senseless. This, some of the scholars say, was the first time such a thing happened to a Muslim. He was between sixteen and eighteen years old.

When he woke, they came back and asked him again. By Allah, he answered, I believe in Allah, and I have rejected your idols. Then he said the thing that tells you who he was: go ahead and do what you are going to do, I do not care. So they did. They beat him, then they starved him, then they lashed him. They locked him in coats of metal and left him under the desert sun until the iron burned him. They experimented on him with torture, looking for the method that would break him, and none of it worked.

In their rage they reached for something crueller. They took burning coals and pressed his back down onto them, and they held him there until, the narrations say, the flesh of his back was cooked away. The pieces of melted flesh came off his back. He screamed, and there was no one. No peer beside him, no tribesman to shield him, no companion to sit with him afterward and teach him. And there was worse still: Umm Anmar, enraged when she found him speaking with the Prophet ﷺ, took a red-hot iron and combed it through the hair of his head, so that not only was the flesh seared from his back, his scalp was branded too, until the agony made him faint.

Sit with the strangeness of it. A boy of sixteen or eighteen, enduring the very worst a city could devise, and surviving it. He

endured it before the Qur'an had scarcely been revealed, so that Allah alone knows how little of it he had even heard. He endured it with no teacher at his side, no circle of believers, no community. Just him, and his certainty, and his back against the coals. He bore all of it, alone, for the sake of Allah.

Freed for Allah alone

It was Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (may Allah be pleased with him) who ended it. The same man who would buy Bilal out of bondage convinced Umm Anmar to sell Khabbab, and he freed him. When his own father, Abu Quhafah, asked him why he kept spending his wealth to free people who brought him no benefit, Abu Bakr's answer was simple and final: I am freeing them for Allah. For nothing else.

So understand the shape of it. Khabbab was not bought to make swords for a new master. He was not freed for what he could produce. He was freed for the sake of Allah, and he lived the rest of his life in the freedom that the generosity of Abu Bakr, given purely for Allah, had purchased. From then on he was always at the side of the Prophet ﷺ.

And yet freedom did not mean safety. He was still in Makkah, still a man with no clan, and when the disbelievers turned aggressive, when Abu Jahl decided to take out his cruelty on those he knew he could harm without consequence, who was there to protect a freed slave? No one. So the harassment continued, and the punishment continued, and the loss continued, all of it borne for the sake of Allah.

"You are being hasty"

This is the context that gives a famous hadith its full weight, because the man who narrates it is Khabbab himself.

We were suffering greatly at the hands of the disbelievers in those days, he said. And he came to the Prophet ﷺ, who was reclining in the shade of the Kaaba, his back against its wall. Khabbab said to him: O Messenger of Allah, will you not call upon Allah for us? Will you not ask Him to make a way out for us? You can hear the exhaustion in it, and yes, a trace of impatience. This was not a man complaining about an ordinary hardship. This was a man whose back had no skin left on it, asking whether relief would ever come.

The Prophet ﷺ sat up. His face reddened. And he said: there were people before you who would be combed with iron combs, so that nothing of their flesh remained on their bones, and it would not turn them from their religion. There was a man before you who was placed in the ground and sawn in two, and that would not make him abandon his faith. Some scholars say this was the very man who had taught Khabbab something of the religion, sawn in half by his oppressor for refusing to let go of Allah.

Then the Prophet ﷺ gave the promise: Allah will surely complete this matter, until a rider can travel from Sana to Hadramawt fearing none but Allah. But you are being hasty.

He was not belittling Khabbab's pain. He carried his own enormous burdens for the sake of Allah, in ways that would stretch across his whole life. He was teaching him something. Others have walked through worse and held fast, and Allah made a way for them, and Allah will make a way for you. The victory is coming. You are simply rushing it. The believer does not panic and force the ending; the believer is patient, and watches the

plan of Allah unfold, knowing it cannot fail. And there was comfort hidden inside the lesson, the same comfort the Prophet ﷺ gave to Sumayyah's family when he promised them Paradise, and to the Ansar when they asked what they would receive and he answered, simply, Paradise. The deen you are being tortured for, he was telling Khabbab, will succeed. You may not live to see its worldly triumph. You do not know whether you will die under the torture. But what you are suffering for will live, because Allah will see His promise through.

He lived to see it all

And Khabbab lived to see it.

He saw Abu Jahl killed at Badr, the man who had ruled the streets of Makkah with arrogance while Khabbab's parents were slaughtered and Khabbab himself was burned. He saw his old tormentors fall: Siba, who had carried out the torture, was killed by Hamzah (may Allah be pleased with him) in the duel before Badr. And Umm Anmar, who had combed the iron through his head, was struck in her own lifetime by a sickness of the head so severe that, trying to dull the pain, she cauterised her own scalp, combing burning iron through her own flesh exactly as she had done to him, until she perished. Khabbab watched the very punishment she invented turn back upon her.

He fought beside the Prophet ﷺ in every battle, serving honourably to the end. Two moments from those years are worth keeping.

The first: he went to collect a debt from al-As ibn Wa'il, a powerful man who owed him money, perhaps for a sword Khabbab had made. Al-As refused to pay until Khabbab would disbelieve in Muhammad ﷺ. Khabbab answered: by Allah, I will

not disbelieve in Muhammad until you die and are resurrected. Al-As sneered at the very idea, for these were people who denied the resurrection itself. Then, he said, when I am resurrected I will have wealth and children, and I will pay you then. About that arrogance, Allah revealed:

Have you considered the man who rejects Our revelation, who says, 'I will certainly be given wealth and children'?

QUR'AN 19:77

The second is a turning point in the whole story of Islam. Khabbab was in the house of Fatimah, the sister of Umar ibn al-Khattab, teaching her and her husband Said the Qur'an, on the day Umar set out to kill the Prophet ﷺ and was diverted to deal with his own family first. When word came that Umar was at the door, in a fury, Khabbab hid, for nothing would have stopped Umar from killing him. From behind the curtain he heard it all: Umar strike his sister, then soften at the sight of what he had done, then sit and read the page of Surah Taha, and be moved. And Khabbab came out from his hiding place and said to him: I hope that Allah has answered the prayer of the Prophet ﷺ concerning you, for I heard him say, "O Allah, give strength to Islam through the more beloved to You of the two Umars." And so Khabbab, the hidden teacher behind the curtain, had a hand even in the guidance of Umar.

What Khabbab's life asks of our faith

Years passed. Decades. And there is a scene from the end of his life that holds the whole meaning of it.

By now Umar was the Khalifah, the very man Khabbab had once hidden from to keep his head. Islam was no longer something

whispered and hidden; it had spread across the world. In an assembly sat Umar, and Bilal, and Khabbab, and others, men who had been tortured in the sand now sitting in honour. Umar praised them, and asked them to recount their days of torment, now that they were safe. Khabbab lifted his shirt and showed the Khalifah his back. Umar had seen much pain in his life, but at this he was stunned: there was no flesh on Khabbab's back. It had melted and burned away decades earlier, and never fully healed.

That was the promise made good. The man who, by every reasonable expectation, should have died in the first wave of those murdered for their faith, the one with no clan and no shield who came out with his Islam and was tortured for it, somehow outlived nearly all of them, all the way to the time of Ali (may Allah be pleased with him), and lived to see the victory the Prophet ﷺ had foretold.

And here is the thing that should pierce us. Khabbab grew wealthy in his later years, and generous with it. But near the end, when his companions visited him, he wept. He remembered Hamzah and others who died in the early days and took nothing of this world's reward, recalling how Hamzah's body, when they found it, had only a single striped cloak to cover it, too short to cover both his head and his feet at once. And then Khabbab said something almost unbearable: some of us have had our fruits ripen, and we are gathering them now. He was afraid. He feared he had taken his reward here, in this world, and that the verse applied to him:

You squandered the good things you were given in your earthly life, you took your fill of pleasure there.

QUR'AN 46:20

Think of who is saying this. A man whose back was cooked over coals for the sake of Allah, who endured what almost no one endured, was afraid that his comfort in old age meant his account in the next life had run dry. He did not feel entitled to a single blessing for everything he had suffered. He held everything he had borne as having been for Allah, and so he claimed nothing back.

This is what his life asks of us, and it is not first of all about courage. It is about who we do everything for.

Few of us will be tested with coals on our skin. But the deepest thing in him was not the endurance; it was the direction of his heart. He believed the instant the truth reached him, before it was safe, before anyone joined him, before he had a community or a teacher or even much of the Qur'an. That is the trust this religion asks of you: to give your heart to Allah and His promise before the outcome is visible, to say "I believe" in the dark and not wait for the light. And then, having given it, to claim nothing. To do the deed for Allah alone and feel no entitlement, no sense that He owes you ease because you obeyed. If a man whose flesh was burned away felt unworthy of this world's comfort, who are we to bargain with Allah, to serve Him with one eye on the reward, to feel that our small obediences have earned us a debt He must repay?

So take the lesson into an ordinary life. When the truth is clear to you, act on it before it is comfortable, before the people around you make it easy. Do one act of obedience that no one will ever know about, and want no thanks for it, not even from yourself. And when hardship comes, and the relief is slow, hear the Prophet ﷺ saying it to you as he said it to Khabbab: the help of Allah is coming, you are only being hasty. The believer does not

force the ending. He trusts that what he gives to Allah is never lost, that what he suffers for Him is seen, and that Allah will not let the reward of one who strove for Him go to waste. Khabbab feared his reward had been spent, and yet Ali, passing his grave after the battle of Siffin, said of him: may Allah have mercy on Khabbab. He embraced Islam wholeheartedly, and he made hijrah in full obedience, and he lived his whole life as one striving in the path of Allah, and Allah will not waste the reward of such a man.

May Allah be pleased with Khabbab ibn al-Aratt, who gave his body to Allah and asked for nothing in return, and may He make us, in our own quiet way, among those who believe early, give in secret, suffer patiently, and place their whole hope in Him alone, and gather us with Khabbab and his companions around our beloved Prophet ﷺ in Paradise.

This chapter follows the account of Khabbab ibn al-Aratt (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (19:77, 46:20). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Sumayyah bint Khayyat

The First Martyr

When the prophets are raised on the Day of Judgment, and behind them the truthful, and behind them the martyrs, there will be one soul brought forward before all the rest of this ummah. Not a famous warrior. Not a wealthy chief. Not a young man cut down in his prime on a battlefield. The first martyr of this religion, the first to fall for the sake of Allah, was an old, frail, enslaved woman from Abyssinia, a woman the city of Makkah considered beneath its notice. Her name was Sumayyah bint Khayyat, and her story is short for the worst possible reason: she did not live long enough to have one. We learn about her almost entirely from the way she died.

But that is the point. Some lives are measured by their length. Hers is measured by a single moment, and that moment carried more weight than entire decades of lesser lives.

A life with no easy years

Sumayyah bint Khayyat (may Allah be pleased with her) was born about twenty years before the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, which means that by the time she embraced Islam and was killed for it, she was well into her sixties. She was senior even to Khadijah. She was an Abyssinian woman, from the land we now call Ethiopia, and she lived in Makkah as the enslaved servant of Abu Hudhayfah ibn al-Mughirah, the brother of al-Walid ibn al-

Mughirah, one of the great chiefs of the powerful tribe of Banu Makhzum.

Her husband, Yasir (may Allah be pleased with him), was older still, a man so aged it was said he had no eyebrows left. He had come to Makkah from Yemen for a tender, human reason: he had a brother who had gone out and been lost, and Yasir traveled all that way searching for him. He never found him. But in the searching he settled in Makkah, sought the protection of Abu Hudhayfah, and in time his master gave him Sumayyah in marriage. Together they served, and together they had a son, Ammar (may Allah be pleased with him), born around the same time as the Prophet ﷺ himself.

Hold this picture before you, because everything else depends on it. Here was a family at the very bottom of Makkan society. Not Arab. Not free in any way that gave them a voice. Not protected by a tribe of their own. An old woman, an old man, and their grown son, living their entire lives in the service of others, with no honor, no wealth, no standing, nothing the world teaches us to chase. Sumayyah had never known a comfortable day. She did not enter Islam from a position of ease and then lose it. She had nothing to lose in the eyes of Makkah, and that, strangely, is exactly what made her so dangerous to the proud.

The Pharaoh of this ummah

To understand what happened to Sumayyah, you have to understand the man who killed her. His name was Abu Jahl, and the Prophet ﷺ called him the Pharaoh of this ummah. He was a chief of Banu Makhzum, a man of enormous physical size, the build of Umar ibn al-Khattab. And he carried a grievance that ate at him.

His tribe, he believed, could compete with the clan of the Prophet ﷺ in everything. In hospitality. In lineage. In wealth. In poetry. In every arena of Arab pride, they could hold their own. But there was one thing they could not match, one thing that would render them forever second: they could not produce a prophet. To acknowledge that the truth had been given to a rival house was, for Abu Jahl, unbearable. So he set himself against the message with a particular kind of cruelty. He was not merely an opponent. He was the one who always pushed to the next level, who proposed the most despicable methods, who opened each new door of persecution so that others could walk through it behind him.

And he understood something about power. The believers who had clans to defend them, like the Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr, could be pressured but not openly broken. So Abu Jahl turned his attention to those no one would defend. He beat a young enslaved woman named Hamamah until the blows took her eyesight and left her blind. He made public spectacles of the vulnerable, because their suffering sent a message to everyone watching: leave this religion, or this is what awaits you.

When Abu Hudhayfah, Sumayyah's master, died around the dawn of Islam, the family of Yasir was left entirely at the mercy of the tribe. They were not quite slaves anymore, and they were not free either, suspended in a vulnerable limbo with no one to advocate for them. And Abu Jahl wanted exactly that. He did not want them ransomed or freed, the way Bilal and Khabbab would later be purchased out of bondage. He wanted to make an example. He wanted to prove a point.

The seven who would not bend

Among the very first to declare their Islam openly in Makkah were seven souls: the Prophet ﷺ, Abu Bakr, Bilal, Khabbab, Suhayb, Sumayyah, and her son Ammar, with Yasir embracing the faith soon after. The first two were shielded by their people. The other five were precisely the kind of believers who could be tortured without consequence.

So they were tortured. They were forced into metal coats of armor and left in the punishing desert sun, beaten beneath the burning iron, kept thirsty until their bodies failed. We know the famous scene of Bilal pinned beneath a boulder, refusing to say anything but *ahadun ahad*, One, One. We know the agony of Khabbab. The plan was simple and patient: break the weakest first, publicly and brutally, and the rest would scatter.

It did not work. Not one of them left the faith. Every single one of these tortured souls held firm, and all but one of them lived to see the religion they suffered for rise into glory.

The one exception was Sumayyah.

When she embraced Islam, she said something to the Prophet ﷺ that would echo through everything that came after. She bore witness that he was the Messenger of Allah, and she added: your promise is true. It was that conviction, the certainty that the promise was true, that would hold her steady through everything Abu Jahl could devise.

And he devised a great deal. Because Sumayyah, more than any of the others, infuriated him. She was old. She was frail. She was a woman, enslaved, foreign, without a shred of the status the world respects. By every worldly measure she should have been the easiest to break. And she would not break. The more he tortured her, the more determined she became. She became the one he experimented on, testing his cruelty against her precisely

because he knew no one would come to her aid. She was buried partway into the ground. She was beaten and kicked and dipped into water and left in the heat. Every form of torment he could imagine, he tried on this elderly woman, and each time she answered his violence with the remembrance of Allah.

He would scream at her to curse Muhammad ﷺ or die a horrible death. He did not merely want her to renounce her faith; he wanted her to publicly insult the Prophet ﷺ, to spit on the name. And Sumayyah, beaten and bleeding, would turn the curse back on him and on his idols. She would not say a single word that displeased her Lord. She would not dishonor the name of the Prophet ﷺ. There was a poem written about her that captured it: that Sumayyah refused to utter anything that would anger Allah, and the more her enemies tortured her, the more the sweetness and the fragrance of her faith shone through, until she dwelt among the ranks of the righteous.

What the Prophet ﷺ could only say

This is one of the hardest scenes in the whole of the early seerah, and it is hard because of what the Prophet ﷺ could not do. He could not buy their freedom, because of the strange status that trapped them. He could not fight Abu Jahl, not yet. He could not shield them. All he could do was walk past this family as they were being tortured in the open, and offer them the one thing he could give.

He would say: be patient, O family of Yasir, for your appointed place is Paradise. And he would pray: O Allah, forgive the family of Yasir.

Notice what he did not promise them. He did not say that Allah would soon remove their oppressor. He did not say that the world

was about to turn in their favor, that better days were coming, that the city would one day honor them. He promised them Paradise, and nothing else, because in their case there were only two ways this could end: death, or renouncing the faith. They would never renounce it. So the promise was simply Jannah. And it is worth sitting with the fact that the Prophet ﷺ considered that enough.

This was the same answer he would later give the Ansar of Madinah when they asked what they would receive in return for taking him in and risking everything. He did not promise them empires or honor or the transformation of their city. He said: Paradise. The promise of Allah was the whole of it, and it was meant to be enough.

The Prophet ﷺ once described what awaits such a person. On the Day of Judgment, the human being who suffered the worst affliction in all of this world will be dipped into Paradise just one time. One single dip. And then that person will be asked: have you ever seen any hardship? Have you ever known a single day of misery? And the answer will come: never. By that one immersion in Paradise, every memory of pain is erased, as though suffering had never touched them at all. Now consider Sumayyah, who never tasted ease in this entire life, not before Islam and not within it, and who endured torture beyond what most could imagine. Not one dip awaited her, but the full and lasting bliss of being the very first of this ummah to cross over into the promise.

The spear, and the first soul to cross over

The torment dragged on. And then Abu Jahl found a way to sink lower than he already had. Sumayyah was tied to the trunk of a tree, being beaten, with her husband Yasir before her, himself

near death. And in his cruelty Abu Jahl threw a vile insult at her: that her husband would die first, but perhaps that was what she wanted, since she was surely waiting to marry Muhammad ﷺ.

She spat at him. This old, frail, dying woman spat in the face of the tyrant and said: may Allah humiliate you, enemy of Allah. By Allah, you are smaller in my sight than a beetle I would crush beneath my foot.

That was the moment. At those words, Abu Jahl took up a spear and drove it through her midsection. Yasir watched the Pharaoh of this ummah kill his wife, and he himself would die very shortly after, becoming the second martyr of Islam. Her cry rang through the streets of Makkah and carried a message that the persecution had reached a new and terrible level.

But here is what the Prophet ﷺ taught about the martyr. The one who is killed for the sake of Allah sees their place in Paradise with the very first strike. So when that spear struck her, this woman who had never once seen joy or ease in all her long, hard life, saw in that instant her place in Jannah. She saw the true promise the Prophet ﷺ had given her. And her soul ascended, the first soul of this entire ummah to depart for the gardens, going ahead of every companion, every believer, every one of us, to be received by her Lord.

Allah says of those like her:

[Prophet], do not think of those who have been killed in God's way as dead. They are alive with their Lord, well provided for,

QUR'AN 3:169

The son who watched, and was forgiven

There is a final thread that must be drawn, because it belongs to the mercy of this story. Ammar, their son, was tortured too, and forced to watch his mother and father destroyed before his eyes. In one moment of unbearable weakness, with the demand to curse the Prophet ﷺ ringing in his ears and his own death pressing on him, Ammar said the words they wanted, to save his life.

Afterward he was crushed with shame. He could not face the Prophet ﷺ, lowering his head, hiding himself. The Prophet ﷺ asked him gently what was wrong, and Ammar confessed that he had cursed him under the torture. And the Prophet ﷺ did not rebuke him. He told him he was forgiven, and said: if they do it to you again, then say it again. Because the words had come from his tongue, not from his heart. About people in exactly this situation, Allah revealed an exception in the Book, for the one who is forced to speak words of disbelief while the heart stays firm in faith:

With the exception of those who are forced to say they do not believe, although their hearts remain firm in faith, those who reject God after believing in Him and open their hearts to disbelief will have the wrath of God upon them and a grievous punishment awaiting them.

QUR'AN 16:106

Ammar would have to live for years afterward, watching his mother's murderer walk free and proud through the streets of Makkah, unable to do anything about it. Until the day of Badr came, years later. Abu Jahl, the Pharaoh of this ummah, was struck down on that battlefield, brought low by the very kind of people he had spent his life humiliating. And the Prophet ﷺ went to Ammar and told him: Allah has killed the killer of your mother.

Not a soldier killed him. Not chance. Allah. And Ammar, who lived a long life and was himself martyred about fifty years later, was at last reunited with the mother who had gone ahead of him.

What Sumayyah's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read about a woman speared to death for her faith and feel that her story belongs to another world, a world of dramatic trials that will never knock on our ordinary doors. That feeling is a kind of escape, and we should not take it. Her life is not a relic to admire from a safe distance. It is a question pressed directly against our own iman.

Begin with what she said the day she believed: that the promise is true. Everything she endured rested on that single conviction. She was not promised relief, or rescue, or a single better day in this world, and she received none of them. She was promised Paradise, and she staked her entire existence on the truth of a promise she could not yet see. This is the very nerve of faith: to trust Allah and His promise before any of it is visible, to hold to "His word is true" while the spear is still in the tyrant's hand. We tend to want the promise proven before we commit to it. She committed to it first, and was proven right forever.

Look, too, at what she refused to do. Under torment that would have loosened almost any tongue, she would not utter one word that displeased her Lord. Her body was in Abu Jahl's power; her heart was not. That distinction is the whole of sincerity, ikhlas: that what we do, we do for Allah alone, answerable to Him and not to the pressure of the people around us. Most of us shape our words and deeds to the room we are standing in, to who is watching, to what is safe to say. She measured every word against one question only, whether it pleased Allah, and she did not flinch from the answer even when it cost her her life. Ask how

much of your own speech and silence is governed by the fear of people, and how much by the desire to please your Lord.

And consider the strangest mercy in her story, the one meant to lift your heart. By every reckoning of this world, Sumayyah's life was a tragedy: an enslaved woman who never knew comfort, tortured in her old age, killed without justice, buried before she could see a single fruit of what she suffered for. And yet she was the first soul of this entire ummah to enter the promise, ahead of the greatest companions, received by her Lord, alive and well provided for while Makkah thought her gone. The honor of Allah does not recognize the rankings of this world. It does not care for tribe or wealth or freedom or status. What the streets of Makkah saw as the death of a worthless slave, the heavens recorded as the first and most honored crossing into Paradise. This should change how you weigh your own life. What the world calls small, Allah may be raising high. What you give and suffer for His sake is never wasted, even when no one sees it, even when nothing in this world ever pays it back.

So carry one thing of hers into your own ordinary days. The trial of the spear is not yours, and may Allah never test you with it. But the choice beneath it is yours every single day: to trust the promise before it is fulfilled, to keep your tongue and your heart for Allah when the room would pull them elsewhere, to hold steady in some small hardship without bartering away your faith to escape it. Do one thing today that pleases Allah even though it costs you something and no one will applaud it. That is the road Sumayyah walked, the whole way to its end. May Allah be pleased with Sumayyah, the first martyr of this ummah, and with her husband Yasir and her son Ammar, and may He gather us with them, with the prophets and the truthful and the martyrs, in the highest gardens of Firdaws.

This chapter follows the account of Sumayyah (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (3:169, 16:106). Where the histories carry more than one narration or spelling, the most widely reported has been followed.

Zayd ibn al-Harithah

The Beloved of the Beloved

There is a name the Companions used for one man among them, and they used it carefully, because it carried the whole weight of his life in three words. They called him Hibb Rasulillah, the loved one of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Not a friend of the Prophet ﷺ, not a follower, not even only a son. The beloved. The Prophet ﷺ loved many people, and the Prophet ﷺ was loved by many, but this man was singled out by the language itself, and to love him became one of the ways a believer loved the Prophet ﷺ in turn.

His name was Zayd ibn al-Harithah (may Allah be pleased with him). He was a man of dark skin, short in stature, slight of build, with no great frame to command a room. He was about ten years younger than the Prophet ﷺ. He was not born into the city of Makkah, nor into nobility, nor even into freedom that he was allowed to keep. And yet of all the men and women who walked beside the Prophet ﷺ through revelation and persecution and exile, Zayd is the only one whose name Allah placed permanently into the Qur'an, so that to this day, when a reciter reaches it, the sound of his name is itself an act of worship.

To understand how a kidnapped boy came to that station, you have to begin where his life nearly ended.

A boy taken in the night

Zayd's father was Harithah ibn Sharahil, of the Arab tribe of Banu Kalb, a respected house that lived not in Makkah but on the outer edges of that world. His mother was a woman named Su'da. Zayd was their child, loved and watched over, and his beginning was ordinary in the way that safety is ordinary, until it was taken from him in a single night.

He himself remembered exactly how it happened. He was a young boy travelling with his mother to visit her relatives. They had pitched their tent on the way and lain down to sleep. In the dark, a band of raiders fell on the camp. They took the food and the money, and then they took the child. He was carried off from his mother's side, a small boy who could still recall, years later, the name of the tribe that seized him, Banu al-Qayn, a hard people known for raiding the roads under the cover of night and vanishing before dawn.

They did not keep him. The strategy of such men was speed: seize, sell, disappear, before anyone could trace the captive back to them. So they took the boy straight to the slave market and sold him cheaply, for a few quick coins, and moved on. In one night a free child of an honoured family had been turned into property to be passed from hand to hand. The parallel suggests itself almost unbidden, the story of another boy thrown into a well by those who should have protected him and sold for a pittance in a distant market. Allah described that boy in His Book:

and then sold him for a small price, for a few pieces of silver: so little did they value him.

QUR'AN 12:20

That was Yusuf. And in the same world, in much the same way, a boy named Zayd was valued at almost nothing by the men who

sold him, while two people far away were breaking under the loss of him.

A father weeping at his door

Harithah did not stop looking for his son. Neither did Su'da. The father in particular carried a grief that the years did not heal, and because he was a poet, his sorrow has come down to us in his own words. He would sit outside his door and weep, and he would compose verses for the boy who had vanished.

He said that he wept for Zayd, not knowing what had become of him, not knowing whether his son was still alive in the world so that he might one day hope to see him again, or whether death had already taken him. He was a man begging, in the end, only for closure. He asked aloud whether Zayd had died on open ground or whether some mountain had been his end, because even the cruelty of a confirmed death felt kinder than the not-knowing. A parent searching the horizon for a child who may be alive, who may be dead, who is in truth standing in a slave market a journey away: this was the wound that had been opened, and it stayed open for years.

The boy, meanwhile, had been bought. A man named Hakim ibn Hizam, the nephew of Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her), came to the market and purchased Zayd for four hundred dirhams, a small price for a small boy with no strength and no standing. Hakim brought him to his aunt Khadijah and gave him to her as a servant. And when Khadijah married the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, this was the household Zayd was brought into, the one place in all the world where what had been stolen from him would be given back to him in a form he could never have imagined.

Chosen, when freedom was offered

The Prophet ﷺ and Zayd took to one another at once. This was before any revelation, when the Prophet ﷺ was still simply the most trusted man in Makkah. He saw something in the boy's character, in his modesty and his bearing, and he loved him for it. Khadijah noticed. She asked her husband whether he loved Zayd, and when he said yes, she gave the boy to him outright. The Prophet ﷺ did not treat him as anyone beneath the house. He raised him as a son, made no distinction between him and his own children, and Zayd grew inside that love.

Then one day the past walked into Makkah. Harithah's brother had seen Zayd at the Kaaba and recognised him after all the years, and Harithah came at once. He found the Prophet ﷺ seated by the Kaaba and addressed him with the dignity of a desperate father. You are people of Banu Hashim, he said, known for your generosity, known for taking up the cause of the orphan and the one in need. My son was taken from me and made a slave. Name your price for him, whatever it is, and I will pay it and set him free.

The Prophet ﷺ answered with something better than a price. Let us call Zayd, he said, and let him choose. If he wishes to go with you, take him, and there is no ransom owed. He is your son. He was taken unjustly. He may go back to his father and his mother freely.

So Zayd was called, and one can only imagine what moved through him in that moment, the father he had lost standing before him, the household that had become his own behind him. The Prophet ﷺ asked him whether he knew these two men. Zayd said yes. He was asked who they were. He said, my father and

my uncle. And the Prophet ﷺ told him plainly: you are free to go with them, no ransom, nothing.

Zayd did not hesitate. He said he would stay. The Prophet ﷺ said nothing to sway him; he had already given the boy his freedom to choose. But the father could not understand it. Would you choose slavery over freedom, he asked, over your father and your mother and your home and your people? And Zayd answered with words that have never lost their force. He said he had seen something from this man that he could never describe, and that he would never be the one to part from him. The father then asked what his master did with him, and Zayd said that this man treated him better than he treated his own children and his own family.

Remember when this was said. The Prophet ﷺ had not yet received a word of revelation. There was no message to follow, no paradise being promised, no community to belong to. There was only the character of one man, and a boy who had tasted enough of the world's cruelty to know exactly what he was looking at when he finally found mercy. He chose it over his own freedom and his own blood.

The Prophet ﷺ understood that the father's real concern was not Zayd's wellbeing, which was plain, but his standing in society, the shame of a son who was still called a slave. So he took Zayd to the steps of the Kaaba and announced before the people: bear witness that he is free. This is my son. He inherits from me and I inherit from him. In that moment the father's grief turned to gladness, because now his son was both a free man and a son of a noble house, and Zayd was glad, because he would not have to leave the man he loved. From that day he was known as Zayd ibn

Muhammad, and he carried that name until Allah Himself changed it.

The one who stood between him and the stones

When the call to Islam came, Zayd did not resist it. He is remembered as the first freed slave, the first of the mawali, to accept Islam at the hands of the Prophet ﷺ. And because he was raised as a son of that house, he was there for the things sons are there for, including the day the Prophet ﷺ would later name as the hardest of his entire life.

By then Khadijah had died, and Abu Talib, the uncle who shielded him, had died, and Makkah had become open ground where the Prophet ﷺ could be struck by anyone with no one to answer for it. He went out to the town of Ta'if to seek refuge and a hearing, and for the better part of two weeks he was mocked and refused at every door, rejected not gently but in the most humiliating way the people could devise. And Zayd was with him. There was no one else.

At the end of it, the people of Ta'if lined their children and their slaves and their thugs into two rows and made the Prophet ﷺ walk between them down a long stretch of road, and as he passed they pelted him with stones and struck him and spat on him. He fell again and again. By the end not a part of his body was untouched by blood; even his sandals filled with it. And through all of it Zayd was trying to throw himself in front of the Prophet ﷺ, a single man trying with his own body to catch the blows meant for another. He was bloodied too. When at last they reached the shade of a tree and the Prophet ﷺ sank down beneath it and turned to his Lord, asking in the most broken of words to whom he was being left, it was Zayd who was beside him, and Zayd who saw the angel come with the offer to crush

the people of the valley, and Zayd who heard the Prophet ﷺ refuse it, choosing mercy, hoping that from the children of these people there might one day come those who worship Allah alone.

Years later, when Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) asked the Prophet ﷺ whether any day had been worse for him than the battle in which so many of his Companions were killed, he told her that the worst day of his life had been the day of Ta'if. And on that worst of all days, one human being had stood between him and the stones. A bond like that is not built; it is forged, once, and it holds.

A son in everything but name

When the believers migrated, it was Zayd who was sent back to bring out the family of the Prophet ﷺ, escorting them on the road to Madinah. There the Prophet ﷺ paired the emigrants with the helpers, and he paired Zayd with his own uncle, Hamzah (may Allah be pleased with him). The two grew so close that Hamzah, on the eve of battle, entrusted his last will to Zayd. Zayd became one of the archers of the Prophet ﷺ, fighting at Badr, at Uhud, in the campaign of the trench, at Khaybar, standing beside the Prophet ﷺ at the treaty of Hudaibiyyah, and left in charge of Madinah itself when the Prophet ﷺ departed. He was sent out on expedition after expedition, and what is telling is that the Prophet ﷺ placed him in command of every single one. With no adult son of the Prophet's own living past infancy, Zayd was, in the eyes of that society, functioning as his son in everything but blood.

He was integrated fully into the life of the people, and married into the noblest of houses. And in time the Prophet ﷺ, who was working to shatter the rigid hierarchies of tribe and class and wealth that governed who could marry whom, arranged for Zayd to marry Zaynab bint Jahsh (may Allah be pleased with her), a

woman of high birth and standing. It was a deliberate act, meant to break the barrier between a freed man and a noblewoman. But the two could not find peace together, and both came to want the marriage to end.

What Allah revealed through that ending changed two things at once. The marriage was dissolved, and then Allah gave Zaynab in marriage to the Prophet ﷺ himself, abolishing the old custom by which an adopted son's former wife was forbidden, and abolishing too the institution of adoption as it had been practised, replacing the false ascription of lineage with the honest care of fostering. Zayd was not cast out of the love of the Prophet ﷺ; he remained as dear as ever. But he was now to be called by his true father's name, Zayd ibn al-Harithah, because the preservation of true lineage is one of the purposes of the religion. And in the verse that recorded all of this, Allah named him:

When you [Prophet] said to the man who had been favoured by God and by you, 'Keep your wife and be mindful of God,' you hid in your heart what God would later reveal: you were afraid of people, but it is more fitting that you fear God. When Zayd no longer wanted her, We gave her to you in marriage so that there might be no fault in believers marrying the wives of their adopted sons after they no longer wanted them. God's command must be carried out:

QUR'AN 33:37

Of all the Companions, men and women, only Zayd is named outright in the Book of Allah. When his name is recited, it is recited as revelation, repeated until the end of time.

The death announced by an angel

The Prophet ﷺ gave Zayd command of the army at the battle of Mu'tah, on the edge of what is now Jordan, where some three thousand Muslims faced an overwhelming force of the Romans. It was there that Zayd was killed, and with him Ja'far ibn Abi Talib and Abdullah ibn Rawahah, three of the most beloved men around the Prophet ﷺ, all martyred. The news did not reach Madinah first by a messenger riding back from the front. It reached the Prophet ﷺ through the angel Jibril, who came and told him of the deaths before any human report could arrive. And the Prophet ﷺ ascended the pulpit to announce to the people that the angel had brought him word of the loss, and he wept as he told them that his son Zayd was gone. Those present could see the grief in his face. The boy who had been sold for a few coins was buried in the highest honour, mourned by the Messenger of Allah ﷺ with tears, his death carried to the Prophet ﷺ by heaven itself.

His son Usamah ibn Zayd, born to Zayd and Umm Ayman, was loved by the Prophet ﷺ as he loved his own grandchildren, and was named the beloved son of the beloved. When the Prophet ﷺ passed away, it was Usamah he had placed in command of the army bound for the Romans. Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) said of his father that the Prophet ﷺ never sent Zayd out in an expedition without putting him in charge of it, and she said something more, that had Zayd lived, the Prophet ﷺ would have appointed him. Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), as caliph, used to give Usamah a greater share than his own son, and when questioned he answered that the Prophet ﷺ had loved Zayd more than he loved Umar, and Usamah more than Umar's son, and so he would not put before himself anyone the Prophet ﷺ had loved more.

What Zayd's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel that it belongs to another world, a world of slave markets and battles and revelation, and that it asks nothing of an ordinary believer today. That would be to miss the one question his life puts to each of us.

The whole of Zayd's story turns on a single choice made before there was any reward in sight. A father offered him freedom, family, and home, everything the world tells a person to want, and Zayd chose instead to stay with a man who had not yet been told he was a prophet, who could promise him nothing, simply because he had seen something true and could not bear to be parted from it. There was no paradise on the table that day, no community, no Qur'an. There was only character, recognised and loved for its own sake. And that is the root of faith stripped down to its core: to be drawn to what is true and good and to choose it even when it costs you the things you were told to chase. Most of us follow what is good only when it is also safe, also comfortable, also rewarded. Zayd followed it when it meant remaining a servant by his own free will. Ask yourself honestly what you would have chosen on the steps of the Kaaba, with freedom in one hand and the love of the Prophet ﷺ in the other, and let the answer show you where your own heart truly leans.

Notice, too, that Zayd's love for the Prophet ﷺ expressed itself most when it cost him most. On the road at Ta'if he did not stand at a safe distance and admire; he put his own body between the Prophet ﷺ and the stones. Loving what is good is not a feeling we hold; it is a thing we do when it is hardest to do it. There is a lesson here for the family of the Prophet ﷺ that the transcript names directly: being close to him never meant being sheltered from sacrifice; it meant being drawn deeper into it. Nearness to Allah and His Messenger ﷺ is not a cushion. It is a calling to give

more, not less. Anyone who imagines that loving Allah will spare them difficulty has not understood how the ones closest to Him actually lived.

And there is mercy folded into all of this, the kind that should steady you when your own beginnings feel against you. Zayd began as a stolen child, valued at a handful of coins by men who saw nothing in him, and Allah raised him until his name sits in the Qur'an and an angel carried the news of his death. What the world priced at almost nothing, Allah honoured beyond reckoning. Your worth was never set by the people who undervalued you, nor by where your life began. It is set by Allah, and He raises whom He wills by no measure the world would recognise.

So take one concrete thing from Zayd into the life you are living now. Choose what is good for the sake of Allah in a moment when it earns you nothing, when no one is watching and there is no reward in sight but His pleasure, and do it precisely because it is true. Stand by the truth when standing costs you something, the way he stood when the stones were falling. The Prophet ﷺ loved Zayd, and to love Zayd is itself a way of drawing near to Allah and His Messenger ﷺ. May Allah be pleased with Zayd ibn al-Harithah, the loved one, gather us in the company of those whose hearts chose the truth before it was easy, and make us, in our small and ordinary days, among those who are loved by Him.

This chapter follows the account of Zayd ibn al-Harithah (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (12:20, 33:37). Where

the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abu Bakr as-Siddiq

There Will Never Be Another One

There are men whose greatness is announced by their wealth and their conquests. And there are men whose greatness is so quiet that you can sit beside it for years and only understand it when it is gone. Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) was the second kind. He never raised his voice. He never reminded anyone of who he was. He freed slaves before dawn and cooked for an old blind woman on the edge of the city and told no one. And when the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ spoke of him, he did not say merely that this was the best of his ummah. He said that since the prophets and the messengers, the sun had never risen nor set on a better man.

This is the last of three windows onto his life, and it is the one that asks the hardest question of all: what does it mean to be a man whose place no one will ever take again?

The son, and the father

When peace finally came between the Prophet ﷺ and the people of Makkah and the pilgrimage was permitted, the Prophet ﷺ sent a delegation to perform Hajj a full year before he himself would make it, and at the head of that caravan he placed Abu Bakr. It was the kind of trust that says everything without saying anything.

The next year, when the Prophet ﷺ performed his own Hajj, Abu Bakr did not go with him, and the reason is tender. His wife, Asma bint Umayy, gave birth to a son at the miqat, the very place where a pilgrim sets his intention and crosses into the state of ihram. Of all the names a man might choose, Abu Bakr named this son, his only son born after Islam came, Muhammad: the most beloved name to him in all the world. The choice tells you where his heart had set itself long before.

Every member of Abu Bakr's family had entered Islam. Only one held out: his own father, Abu Quhafa, who embraced Islam on the day Makkah was opened, in his old age, his hair and beard gone completely white, his eyesight lost. Abu Bakr took his blind father by the hand and led him to the Prophet ﷺ to give his pledge.

The Prophet ﷺ saw the effort it had cost the old man and said, gently, "Abu Bakr, why did you not leave the elderly man in his home, and I would have come to him?" And Abu Bakr answered that it was more fitting for his father to be brought to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ than for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ to be troubled for him. The Prophet ﷺ took the old man's hand, and Abu Quhafa became Muslim.

Then something happened that reveals the whole architecture of this man's heart. Abu Bakr began to weep. The companions were puzzled. This was a day of joy, they said. Your father has accepted Islam. Why these tears? And he answered that he had hoped the one standing there to give that pledge would not be his own father, but Abu Talib, the uncle the Prophet ﷺ loved like a father, because that would have made the Prophet ﷺ happier. On the day his last loved one entered the faith, he was still measuring his own joy against the joy of the Prophet ﷺ, and

grieving a happiness the Prophet ﷺ never received. He preferred the Prophet ﷺ to himself in the middle of his own celebration.

"Will you not leave my companion alone?"

Of all that is told about Abu Bakr, this may be the dearest scene. The Prophet ﷺ was sitting among his companions in the masjid in Madinah when Abu Bakr came in, holding the edge of his garment so that his shin showed, visibly shaken, his face the face of a man who has just been in a quarrel. The Prophet ﷺ read it at once and said to those around him: your friend here has just had an argument. He knew him that well.

Abu Bakr came and explained. He and Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) had fallen into a dispute, and in the heat of it Abu Bakr had said something he should not have said. He did not throw Umar under the foot or call him hot-headed. He said simply: I was wrong, I regretted it, I went and asked Umar to forgive me, and he refused. So I have come to you to help me get his forgiveness. The Prophet ﷺ put his hand on his shoulder and said three times, "May Allah forgive you, Abu Bakr."

But Umar, meanwhile, had also regretted the refusal. He had gone to Abu Bakr's house to make peace, not found him, and come to the masjid. As Umar walked in, the Prophet's ﷺ face changed; he was visibly displeased. Umar began, "Messenger of Allah, it was me, I was the one who wronged him." And then the Prophet ﷺ, who almost never admonished a man of Umar's standing this way, said something that has echoed down fourteen centuries. He said that Allah had sent him to all of them, and they had said, "You lie," but Abu Bakr had said, "He speaks the truth," and had supported him with himself and his wealth. Then he asked them, twice: "Will you not leave my companion alone for me?"

The word the Prophet ﷺ used for what Abu Bakr gave him, wasani, is the very word he had once used for Khadijah. She gave me her all. He gave me his all. No one ever replaced Khadijah; no one ever replaced Abu Bakr. The narrator said that after that day, no one ever troubled Abu Bakr again. And notice what the Prophet ﷺ was correcting. He was not weighing the argument itself. He was speaking to a reluctance to forgive a man who had never once been reluctant to believe. This man hesitated for nothing where I was concerned, so you should hesitate for nothing in forgiving him.

The friend Allah took before him

On more than one occasion the Prophet ﷺ tried to put into words what this companion was to him, and every time he reached for the language of love itself. He said that every favour anyone had ever done him, he had repaid, except for Abu Bakr, whose favour was so great that only Allah could repay it on the Day of Judgement. He said no one's wealth had ever benefited the mission of Islam the way Abu Bakr's had.

And he said this. If he were ever to take a khalil, the single closest and most intimate of all friends, he would have taken Abu Bakr. But Allah had already taken him as His khalil, as He had once taken Ibrahim. A human heart can hold only one khalil, the scholars explain, but Allah, whose love is unlike ours, can hold more than one. So that place in the Prophet's ﷺ heart was already given to his Lord. "But your companion," he told them, "is the beloved friend of the Most Merciful." It was the highest station of friendship a human being could be offered, and the only thing standing between Abu Bakr and it was that it belonged to Allah first.

The doors that were closed, and a face like the moon

When the time of the Prophet's ﷺ departure drew near, before anyone yet sensed that he was leaving, he stood in the masjid and said that Allah had given one of His servants a choice between the splendour of this world and what is with Allah, and that this servant had chosen what is with Allah. To the gathering it sounded like an ordinary lesson, a parable, and the Prophet ﷺ did not look ill that day.

But Abu Bakr understood. He alone understood. He began to weep and said, "May our fathers and mothers be sacrificed for you, Messenger of Allah." The companions had no idea why this calm sermon had broken him, but he wept until his weeping spread through the whole masjid and they were all weeping, not yet knowing why. He had heard, beneath the parable, that the servant offered the choice was the Prophet ﷺ himself, and that he had chosen to go.

Then the Prophet ﷺ gave an instruction. Every house around the masjid had a small door opening into it, and he ordered that all of those doors be shut, every one of them, except the door of Abu Bakr. In the masjid of Madinah today, you can still find the place marked: the gate of Abu Bakr. Every door closed but his, because, the Prophet ﷺ said, there was nothing he could ever do to repay this man for what he had done.

As the illness deepened and the Prophet ﷺ grew too weak to lead the prayer, he instructed that Abu Bakr lead the people. There was a practical objection: Abu Bakr's voice was low and soft, and he wept so much in recitation that the words did not carry, and in those days there was no way to amplify a voice. Aisha and Hafsa (may Allah be pleased with them) suggested Umar instead, whose voice could fill the masjid. But the Prophet

ﷺ insisted, twice refusing anyone but Abu Bakr, even waking when he heard another voice and asking where Abu Bakr was. This was never only about who would lead a prayer. It was the appointing of a successor, made plain.

So Abu Bakr led the people, some seventeen prayers over three and a half days while the Prophet ﷺ lay dying. And once, gathering what strength remained, the Prophet ﷺ came out wrapped in a single garment, barely able to stand, and sat beside Abu Bakr as he prayed, while Abu Bakr raised his own voice so the people could hear. He was the bridge between the Prophet's ﷺ silence and the people's prayer.

When the Prophet ﷺ passed, Abu Bakr was outside the city. He rode back into a Madinah collapsing in grief, screaming filling the masjid, and did not stop to speak to anyone. He went straight to the house, knelt, and uncovered the face of the Prophet ﷺ. This was the man who would have died in his place a hundred times over. He bent and kissed his forehead and wept, and said, "How pure you are, alive and dead, Messenger of Allah." Allah will not join two deaths upon you; the death decreed for you, you have now tasted, and you will never taste it again. Even there, with his face against the body of the most beloved person on earth, his grief did not unmoor his understanding.

The truth he held when no one else could

Outside, Umar in his shock was refusing to accept it, telling the people the Prophet ﷺ had only gone to his Lord as Musa once had, and would return. Abu Bakr tried twice to quiet him, and when he could not, he simply stood and spoke, and the people gathered around him. Whoever used to worship Muhammad, he said, let him know that Muhammad has died. And whoever

worships Allah, let him know that Allah is alive and never dies. Then he recited the verse that settled the matter forever:

Muhammad is only a messenger before whom many messengers have been and gone. If he died or was killed, would you revert to your old ways? If anyone did so, he would not harm God in the least. God will reward the grateful.

QUR'AN 3:144

There is something hidden in this scene you must not miss. Of every soul in that city, the heart most broken was his. If anyone had a right to be on the ground, undone, it was Abu Bakr, and it was precisely that man who stood and held the ummah to the truth. His love was the deepest of all, yet it never eclipsed what the Prophet ﷺ had come to teach. He loved him for the sake of Allah, and so he could keep standing when love alone would have left him on the floor.

"I am not the best of you"

Then he assumed leadership of the ummah, the first ever to do so. His first words as the successor of the Prophet ﷺ tell you why no one ever assassinated him, why he held a fracturing community together when men were refusing zakat and false prophets were rising on every side. He did not list his credentials or quote the verses revealed about him. He stood before the people and said: O people, I have been placed in charge of you, and I am not the best of you. If I do well, support me; if I do wrong, set me straight. Truthfulness is a trust, and lying is a betrayal. Obey me as long as I obey Allah and His Messenger; and if I disobey them, then you owe me no obedience at all.

Imagine the most truthful man in the ummah, the man called as-Siddiq, beginning his rule by inviting the people to correct him. He governed by transparency and humility, and by that very humility he won them. The highest office on earth did not make him proud; he still rose before dawn to serve the old woman, still convinced he needed to do better.

He also taught Umar, in those days, what it meant to lead. The Prophet ﷺ had appointed Usama bin Zayd, a young man of seventeen, the son of a freed slave, to command the army, a choice that cut across every old bias of age and lineage and race. Some of the elders were uneasy, and they sent Umar to ask Abu Bakr to place an older man in charge. Umar, the large and powerful man, came into the house of the slight, soft-spoken Abu Bakr and raised the matter. And Abu Bakr, this gentle man, took hold of Umar's beard, pulled him close, and said, in effect: do you want me to disobey an order the Prophet ﷺ gave with his own tongue? Umar was not offended. He lowered his head, apologised for even raising the thought, and walked out telling the waiting companions that he hated to upset Abu Bakr. He knew at once that this firmness came not from arrogance but from a man who would put the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ before everything.

The same age, the same cloth, the same day

He led for only about two and a half years, and in that short time he held everything together and set the whole mission back on the Prophet's ﷺ course, plugging every breach, before handing the trust to Umar. Then he took a cold bath, fell ill, and a fever deepened over two weeks until it became clear he was dying.

In those final days he called for his daughter Aisha. First he asked her to compare the wealth he had now to what he had owned

before he became khalifah, and to return any increase to the treasury for the next leader, because it could not have come honestly. She found only a few coins of difference, and he gave them back. He refused to let leadership add a single dirham to his name. Then he asked how old the Prophet ﷺ had been when he died. Sixty-three, she said. He said, with quiet joy, that he was sixty-three too. He asked how the Prophet ﷺ had been shrouded. In three white cloths from Yemen, she said. Then I will be shrouded in three, he said, and take these two I already have and buy only one more. She protested that they could afford three new ones. The new clothes are more deserving of the living than of the dead, he said; the shroud is only to cover the body.

He lay down in his own shroud and asked what day the Prophet ﷺ had died. A Monday, she said. And what day is it now? Monday, she said. He smiled and said, then let it be today. As the fever shook him, he repeated, over and over, the dying words of Yusuf:

My Lord! You have given me authority; You have taught me something about the interpretation of dreams; Creator of the heavens and the earth, You are my protector in this world and in the Hereafter. Let me die in true devotion to You. Join me with the righteous.

QUR'AN 12:101

He died between the prayers of Maghrib and Isha, sixty-three years old like the Prophet ﷺ, in the same house in which the Prophet ﷺ had died, on the same day of the week, in the same kind of shroud, with the prayer to be joined to the righteous on his lips. He was buried beside the Prophet ﷺ, the crown of his head level with the Prophet's ﷺ shoulder. Aisha had once dreamed of three moons falling into her room, and Abu Bakr had

told her three righteous people would be buried in her home. The Prophet ﷺ was the first; Abu Bakr was the second.

When Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) stood at his grave, he spoke of him as a son speaks of a father. You were the first of the people to accept Islam, he said, the most sincere in faith, the most certain. You were to the Prophet ﷺ what hearing and sight are to a man. You believed in him when everyone else called him a liar, so Allah named you in His revelation the truthful one. You were the lowest among us in voice and the highest in honour, a merciful father to the believers when we were suddenly orphaned. And the Prophet ﷺ himself had said that the sun never rose nor set, after the prophets and messengers, on anyone better than Abu Bakr, and that he would be the first of his nation to enter Paradise.

What Abu Bakr's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel small, to decide that such a man belongs to another order of being and has nothing to ask of us. That is a mistake. The Prophet ﷺ did not say there will never be another Abu Bakr so that we would stop trying. He said it so that we would understand what a human being can become when his heart is given entirely to Allah, and then go and give what we can. Every piece of what was in him is within our reach.

His greatness was not in his wealth or his office. It was in a single, simple orientation: he preferred Allah and His Messenger ﷺ to himself, consistently, when it cost him, and when no one was watching. He freed slaves and served an old blind woman before sunrise and let no one know. That is ikhlas, sincerity, the thing that turns an ordinary deed into treasure with Allah. Ask yourself how much of your own good is performed for eyes that

can see it, and whether you could do even one thing today purely for the One who never stops watching.

He trusted the truth more than he trusted his own grief. On the worst day of his life, with the body of the person he loved most before him, he held to what was real, that Allah is alive and does not die, and steadied an entire ummah on it. That is what mature faith does. It does not stop you from weeping; it keeps your weeping from washing away your certainty. When your own grief comes, and it will, his life asks whether your iman is anchored in Allah Himself, who never dies and never leaves, and not in some created thing you cannot bear to lose.

And he never let success make him complacent. The man Allah called truthful in His own book still rose every morning convinced he had to do better, still refused to let leadership add one coin to his name, still chose an old shroud so the living could have the new cloth. That is contentment and humility woven together, the cure for the quiet pride that whispers you have done enough. Whatever good Allah has already given you to do, his life asks you to keep reaching for the next one.

So take something from him into this ordinary week. Prefer Allah to yourself in one decision where it actually costs you. Do one good deed so privately that only Allah will ever know it happened. Hold to your trust in Allah through one hard hour without letting the hardship shake your certainty in Him. This is how the truest of the truthful lived: in sincerity, in trust, in a love for his Lord so complete that the highest friendship in creation was the only thing he was ever offered. May Allah be pleased with Abu Bakr as-Siddiq, raise us upon a measure of his sincerity and his love, and join us, by virtue of our love for him, with him and with the Prophet ﷺ among the truthful and the righteous.

This chapter follows the account of Abu Bakr as-Siddiq (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (3:144, 12:101). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Abu Bakr as-Siddiq

The One Who Set His Own Standard

There is a phrase that the fourth of the rightly guided caliphs, Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him), is said to have used about Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), and it is hard to improve on it. He said that Abu Bakr was the first to every good. Not the first to one good, or the first to most goods, but the first, always, to every single one. He was a man with no real competition in the things that matter, and the strange thing is that he carried this distinction without ever seeming to compete for it. He simply lived at a height the rest could only admire from below.

This is the second part of his story, and it is not about his rank with the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, which is its own subject. It is about something more usable for an ordinary person: the standard he set for himself, and how he kept beating it. Here was a man who had been promised Paradise to his face, more than once, and who responded to that promise not by relaxing but by reaching higher. To understand him, you have to begin with the title he carried, because the title explains the man.

The meaning of as-Siddiq

His nickname was as-Siddiq, the truthful one, and a siddiq is not simply a person who does not lie. Dr. Omar Suleiman draws out three layers in the word. First, a siddiq recognises the truth. There is a quiet connection between the purity of a person's

heart and the clarity of their mind: when the heart is soiled, even a clever person loses the ability to see clearly, and when the heart is pure, the intellect itself becomes pure and grasps truth cleanly. The heart and mind of Abu Bakr were completely in sync, both devoted to the same truth. Second, a siddiq commits to that truth once he sees it. And third, a siddiq never wavers. His resolve does not cool when the enthusiasm cools.

Most of us know the first two and fail at the third. Think of the promises a person makes in Ramadan, or on Hajj, in a moment of heightened feeling: I will do this, I will change that. Then the feeling fades, and so does the promise. A siddiq is the one whose commitment outlasts the emotion that produced it. Allah speaks of exactly this kind of person, the believer who is tested in his resolve and does not lose it:

Do people think they will be left alone after saying 'We believe' without being put to the test?

QUR'AN 29:2

The Qur'an places such people in a remarkable rank. There are the prophets, the highest. Then, in the verse that lists the company of the blessed, come the siddiqun, the truthful, and only then the martyrs. The truthful are ranked above the martyrs. The scholars explain why with a question every Muslim can answer: are we judged by our actions or our intentions? By our intentions. And the siddiq carries, at every moment of his life, the intention to pay any price for the truth, including his life. The martyr is truthful in the single moment of his death. The siddiq is truthful across the whole of his living. So the reward of martyrdom is already folded into him, along with everything else

he does. And among all the siddiqun of this ummah, Abu Bakr leads the pack.

The night they came to break him

The title was not self awarded. There is a precise moment when the Prophet ﷺ began to call him by it, and it is worth standing inside that moment, because it shows the third layer of siddiq, the part that does not waver, under real pressure.

This was still in Makkah, in the years of harassment and humiliation, before any migration. The Prophet ﷺ had been taken on the Night Journey, al-Isra wal-Mi'raj, from Makkah to Jerusalem and through the heavens and back, all in a single night. On the way back, he confided to the angel Jibril a very human fear: my people will not believe me. And Jibril answered him with a name. Abu Bakr will believe you, for he is as-Siddiq.

The next morning the Prophet ﷺ told the people. Abu Jahl could not believe his luck. He gathered everyone: come, listen to this man repeat what he just told me. The Prophet ﷺ repeated it, and they erupted in mockery, pointing and jeering, certain they finally had proof he had lost his mind. And then they had an idea. Go to Abu Bakr. He is intelligent, he is respected, and if he can be made to doubt, the small bruised community around the Prophet ﷺ might begin to crack. So a delegation went to him first, before the Prophet ﷺ could reach him.

Have you heard what your companion is claiming, they asked. He says God took him in a single night to Jerusalem and back. Watch the precision of his first words. He did not say "let me go ask him." He said: did he say that? They said yes. And he answered, in kana qala faqad sadaq, if he said it, then he has spoken the truth. It is a perfect answer, because it does two things at once. It

refuses to trust the mockers, who might be exaggerating or inventing, and it extends total trust to the Prophet ﷺ. They pressed him, astonished. He said: I believe him in something far greater than this. I believe him when he tells me revelation comes to him from the heavens. If I believe that, why would this be hard? It was for this that the Prophet ﷺ began to call him as-Siddiq, and the narrations report that Allah Himself named Abu Bakr the truthful one upon the tongue of His Prophet ﷺ.

There is a freedom in that answer that is easy to miss. Abu Bakr was not weighing the social cost, not calculating whether belief would make his life harder. The whole town was laughing. He simply went where the truth was. That is what it looks like when recognition and commitment and resolve are all pointing the same direction in a single heart.

A bet on a promise

His confidence was not reserved for the dramatic occasions. Around this time, while the Muslims were still weak and persecuted, Allah revealed verses about a distant war. The Persians, fire worshippers, had been crushing the Byzantine Romans, who were Christians, and the polytheists of Makkah taunted the Muslims with it: just as our brothers defeat your brothers, we will defeat you. The Romans looked finished, driven into their smallest corners. And into that, Allah revealed a prophecy:

The Byzantines have been defeated in a nearby land. They will reverse their defeat with a victory in a few years' time. God is in command, first and last. On that day, the believers will rejoice.

QUR'AN 30:2-4

This was, in a way, a harder claim to make than the Night Journey, because anyone could see, tangibly, that the Romans were done. To stake the message on a reversal looked reckless. Abu Bakr did not hesitate. He went to a man named Ubayy ibn Khalaf and told him the Romans would win within a few years. Ubayy wanted to bet on it. They agreed on ten camels. (This was before gambling was forbidden, in the years before Madinah, a detail the scholars note carefully so the wager is not mistaken for a model to follow; and in any case it was no real gamble to Abu Bakr, for he was not guessing.) When Abu Bakr later mentioned it to the Prophet ﷺ, he was guided to raise the stake and lengthen the term, the Qur'an having said "a few years." Years passed. The Romans looked worse, not better. Ubayy mocked him. Abu Bakr raised the bet to a hundred camels, an entire fortune, more than he even owned. When the Muslims migrated, the bet rode on the family; Abu Bakr's son guaranteed it.

Then in the year of the Battle of Badr, after roughly eight years, the Romans suddenly defeated the Persians. The same year, at Badr, the small Muslim army defeated the vast army of Quraysh. The verse had carried a double meaning: the believers would rejoice both at the Romans' victory and at their own. Abu Bakr's hundred camels came due, taken from what Ubayy left behind, and Abu Bakr gave every last one of them away in charity. He had not wanted the camels. He had wanted to show, in public and at great risk, that what the Prophet ﷺ brought was simply true.

The man who saw what only the Prophet could see

This same clarity made Abu Bakr the one whose vision lined up with the Prophet's ﷺ even when no one else could see it. At the treaty of Hudaibiyyah, the Muslims were asked to sign terms that felt like humiliation: turned back from the sacred house,

forbidden even to write the Prophet's ﷺ name as Messenger of Allah on the document. The companions were anguished. Are we not on the truth, they asked, are they not on falsehood? Even strong believers struggled to accept it. Abu Bakr was the one who saw what the Prophet ﷺ saw, that Islam would flourish in peace, that an open road to preach was worth more than a battle. He said afterward that no one shared the Prophet's ﷺ vision that day except him.

The deepest test of that clarity came at the end. When the Prophet ﷺ passed away, the Muslims in Madinah were shattered; many could not accept it. No one on earth loved the Prophet ﷺ more than Abu Bakr, and no one was hurting more in that hour. But his love was bound to the mission the Prophet ﷺ had lived for, and he understood at once what the Prophet ﷺ would have wanted: the message must not be compromised by his death. He stood before the grieving people, his voice soft, and they gathered to him anyway. Whoever used to worship Muhammad, he said, let him know that Muhammad has died; and whoever worships Allah, let him know that Allah is ever living and never dies. Then he recited a verse of the Qur'an reminding them that the Prophet ﷺ was a messenger, and messengers pass on. Umar later said it was as though he had never heard that verse until that moment. While everyone else was drowning in grief, Abu Bakr held the truth steady, because that is what a siddiq does.

The standards no one asked him to keep

Now we reach the heart of why his life is so useful to us. Abu Bakr did not lead in one or two virtues. He led in all of them, and then kept private virtues besides. There is a famous day when the Prophet ﷺ asked his companions a series of questions. Who

is fasting today? Abu Bakr was. Who followed a funeral procession today? Abu Bakr had. Who fed a poor person today? He had. Who visited someone sick today? He had. And the Prophet ﷺ said that no one combines all of these in a single day except that he enters Paradise. The point was not a quiz Abu Bakr happened to pass. This was simply his ordinary day. Fasting, the funeral prayer, feeding the poor, visiting the sick, all of it, on top of everything else he carried.

Once he heard the Prophet ﷺ describe the gates of Paradise, how a person devoted to prayer would be called from the gate of prayer, a person of charity from the gate of charity, a person of fasting from the gate of fasting, and so on. Abu Bakr asked: is there anyone who could be called from all the gates at once? And the Prophet ﷺ answered, yes, and I hope you are one of them. Most of us would care only that we got in at all, through any door. Abu Bakr aimed for every door, and was told he would have them.

Then there is the standard he kept where no one was watching, which is the part of his life that should unsettle us most. After he became the caliph, the most important man in the ummah, Umar grew curious about where Abu Bakr disappeared to every morning after the dawn prayer, walking away from the city into the desert. One day Umar followed him at a distance and watched him enter a broken down old house far outside Madinah, and stay a long time, until the sun was high and hot, before making his way back to govern. When Abu Bakr had gone, Umar knocked. An elderly woman opened the door, blind, frail, with orphan children around her. Who is the man who comes to you every day, Umar asked. She said she did not know; he had never once told her his name. What does he do? She said, may Allah reward him: he cleans my home, washes our clothes, grinds our

wheat, bakes our bread, cooks our breakfast, and then he leaves. And Umar wept, and said, you have exhausted every successor who comes after you, Abu Bakr.

Consider how many such deeds history never recorded, because Abu Bakr made sure no one knew his name. When people told him that milking the goats of the widows and orphans, which he had done before he was caliph, was now beneath his office, he refused to stop. He said he would hate for the title of caliph to change a good habit in him, so that it might be said: he used to do good until he became leader, and then he abandoned it. The Prophet ﷺ had said the leader of a people is their servant, and Abu Bakr meant it literally.

Why he always won

Umar, who became one of the greatest leaders in history, used to compete with Abu Bakr, and always lost. He once decided, today I will finally outdo Abu Bakr. When the Prophet ﷺ called for charity, Umar brought half of everything he owned. The Prophet ﷺ asked what he had left for his family. Half, he said, and he was praised, and he was thrilled. Then Abu Bakr arrived, and the Prophet ﷺ asked him what he had left for his family. Abu Bakr said: I left them Allah and His Messenger. And Umar said, I will never be able to beat you in anything. Most of the good qualities people later admired in Umar he had learned from this man, his mentor.

What was the engine underneath it all? Dr. Omar Suleiman ends with a saying attributed to the early scholar al-Hasan al-Basri: Abu Bakr did not surpass the others by much fasting or much prayer. He surpassed them because of something settled in his heart. That something was certainty in Allah's promise, and a constant desire to do better. He did not wait for someone else to

blaze the trail. He saw a good and ran to it first, seeking nothing but the pleasure of his Lord. There is even a glimpse of this in his old age and gentleness turned to fierceness when it mattered: Ali, who was no flatterer, said you should have seen Abu Bakr at Badr, standing in front of the Prophet ﷺ like a ferocious lion, letting no one near him. The same soft voiced man who washed a blind woman's clothes would have given his body for the Prophet ﷺ without a thought. It was all one heart.

What Abu Bakr's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like this and feel small, to file Abu Bakr away as someone whose level was never meant for us. That is the wrong lesson, and it would waste him. His life is not a monument; it is a question put to your own iman. The question is not "could you do what he did," but "for whom are you doing what you already do."

Start with the certainty. Al-Hasan al-Basri said Abu Bakr's secret was not the quantity of his worship but something settled in his heart: certainty in Allah's promise. That is available to you. The man bet a fortune on a verse not because he was reckless but because he genuinely believed Allah's word was more solid than the visible world. Ask honestly whether your own choices, your spending, your time, your risks, reveal that you trust Allah's promise more than what your eyes can measure. Faith is precisely this: to weigh the unseen promise heavier than the seen circumstance, and to act on it before the outcome is clear. Abu Bakr lived as though Paradise were more certain than the ground under him, because to him it was.

Then learn the thing he guarded in the dark. Here was a man already promised Paradise, who still rose before dawn to walk into the desert and bake bread for a blind woman who never

learned his name. He did it for no reward a human being could give him, because no human being even knew. That is ikhlas, sincerity, in its purest form: a good done for Allah alone, content that He has seen it, indifferent to whether anyone else ever will. The lesson lands as a plain instruction. If you have deeds that everyone knows about, make sure you also have deeds that only Allah knows about. Keep one good thing entirely between you and your Lord. Tell no one. Let it be the truest thing you do.

And take his refusal to coast. He had every excuse to do less, the highest excuse of all, a guarantee from the Prophet ﷺ that he was saved. He used it as a reason to do more. Most of us treat a little progress as permission to relax. He treated every good as a door he intended to walk through, and asked the Prophet ﷺ for all the gates at once. You will not match him, and you are not asked to. You are asked not to let your office, your age, your reputation, or your comfort quietly retire a good habit you used to have, the way Abu Bakr refused to let the caliphate stop him from milking an old woman's goats.

So do something today, small and unseen, for the sake of Allah and no one else. Feed someone. Visit someone who is ill. Give a charity no one will trace to you. Hold to a promise you made Allah in a better moment, now that the feeling has faded, because keeping it after the feeling is gone is the whole difference between the rest of us and as-Siddiq. He set his own standard and beat it for the love of his Lord, and that road is still open. May Allah be pleased with Abu Bakr, fill our hearts with a measure of his certainty and his sincerity, and gather us with the truthful in the company of the Prophet ﷺ.

This chapter follows the account of Abu Bakr as-Siddiq (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an

*translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (29:2; 30:2-4; 24:22).
Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most
widely reported has been followed.*

Abu Bakr as-Siddiq

The First to Follow

There is a way of believing that takes its time. It weighs the cost, waits for proof, looks for the safe moment, and only then steps forward. And then there is the way Abu Bakr believed. When the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ told him what had happened in the cave of Hira, that the angel Jibril had come and that Allah had appointed him a Messenger, Abu Bakr did not pause to count what it would cost him. He had position, wealth, and the respect of his people, and every one of those things was now at risk. He said only: I believe you. The Prophet ﷺ would later say that everyone he invited to Islam hesitated at first, except Abu Bakr. As soon as he was called, he answered.

His name was Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), and to understand why he stood second to none in the pursuit of God, you have to follow him from before there was anything to follow.

A man the truth recognised

He came from Banu Taym, a small sub-tribe of Quraysh. It was not one of the great houses of Makkah, not Banu Hashim or Banu Umayyah, not one of the names that carried weight in the city's councils. But it had a quiet nobility. Banu Taym kept out of the tribal feuds, refused to insert itself into the endless cycles of vengeance, and earned a reputation as peacemakers. Among all

the Companions, only two great names would come from this tribe: Abu Bakr and Talhah (may Allah be pleased with them).

His given name was Abdullah ibn Abi Quhafah. But his mother, Umm al-Khayr, had called him by another name first: Atiq, the one set free. Abu Bakr's parents had struggled to keep a son. The boys before him had not survived. So when this one lived, his mother named him as one who had been freed from death, released into the world. Years later the Prophet ﷺ would take that very name and give it a second life, saying that whoever wished to see a man freed from the Fire should look at Abu Bakr. He had been freed from death at his birth, and freed from the Fire on the tongue of the Prophet ﷺ.

He grew into a man who resembled his friend in the things that matter. He loved poetry, but recoiled from any verse that carried idolatry in it. He was a master of lineage, able to name where a person came from, which tribe had mixed with which, going back generations, all held in a remarkable memory. He was sharp, eloquent, and honest, and his honesty made him wealthy, for people trusted him in trade when they trusted few others. He dealt in cloth and garments, and travelled the routes to Syria and Yemen, often in the same company as the young Muhammad ﷺ, whom he had known and loved since childhood.

And like his friend, he had never bowed to an idol. As a boy, his father once sat him before one of the statues at the Kaaba and told him to worship while he stepped away. Abu Bakr looked at the idol and tested it. Clothe me, he said, for I have need of clothing. Nothing. Feed me, for I am hungry. Nothing. He picked up a stone and warned the idol to protect itself, then threw it, and the thing toppled over. This is nonsense, he decided, and he never returned to it. It is hard not to hear, in that scene, an echo

of Ibrahim among the idols of his own people, the same clear mind poking holes in a lie everyone else accepted. And it is no accident that Abu Bakr would one day carry the same title as Ibrahim: as-Siddiq, the truthful, the one who inclines toward truth because something inside him agrees with it.

Why he believed at once

Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) reported that there were three in Makkah who never worshipped an idol and never drank wine: the Prophet ﷺ, Abu Bakr, and one other. Their nature simply refused it. So when the call came, Abu Bakr was not being asked to overturn his life. He was being told, at last, the meaning of everything his nature had already known.

He had spent years close to the Prophet ﷺ, in his private company, watching a character that no one who knew it could doubt. You cannot spend forty years beside such a man and fail to sense that he is different. So when the truth was finally spoken aloud, it landed in a heart already prepared for it. The scholar Ibn al-Jawzi noticed something striking. When the Prophet ﷺ came home shaken from the cave, Khadijah comforted him by listing his virtues: how he kept the ties of kinship, carried the burdens of others, honoured the guest, helped those struck by hardship. Years later, when Abu Bakr set out to migrate and a man of Quraysh stopped him to grant him protection, that man described Abu Bakr in almost the very same words. The two friends had grown so alike that the same praise fit them both.

What is most telling is what Abu Bakr did not think about. Imam an-Nawawi observed that the moment Abu Bakr heard the truth, he did not pause to consider his rank, his standing, or what his support might cost him. He saw the truth and he took it, knowing full well that serious consequences would follow. That is a rare

order of faith: to recognise what is real and commit to it before working out whether it is safe.

The community he built

He did not stop at believing. He went out and built around the Prophet ﷺ the very community that the message would need. Abu Bakr was eloquent, respected, and listened to, and through his tongue people came to Islam by the left and by the right.

Consider what flowed from this one man. Of the ten promised Paradise, Abu Bakr was one, and six others entered through him: Uthman ibn Affan, az-Zubayr ibn al-Awwam, Abd ar-Rahman ibn Awf, Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, Talhah ibn Ubaydullah, and Abu Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrah (may Allah be pleased with them all). Seven of the ten, gathered by one believer. And so all the wealth that Uthman and Abd ar-Rahman would ever spend, all the charity, all the armies they would help to raise, all of it lands also on Abu Bakr's scale. The Prophet ﷺ said that the one who guides to good is like the one who does it, with nothing taken from the doer. Every generous deed of those three, who would become the most giving men of the ummah, traces back to the man who first brought them in. He brought in Abu Salamah too, and others of standing, and then he walked beside the Prophet ﷺ to the tribes, always present, always ready.

The Emancipator

This next part of his life is, perhaps, the most underestimated. In the earliest days, when the persecution fell hardest on the slaves, the poor, and the defenceless, Abu Bakr became the man who bought their freedom.

The most famous was Bilal (may Allah be pleased with him), an Abyssinian slave with no protection in a brutally tribal society, beaten and laid out under a stone in the heat, made an example of for daring to say there is no god but Allah. Abu Bakr came and offered to purchase him. Umayyah, who was torturing Bilal, named a steep price, then sneered that he would have sold him for a single coin. Abu Bakr answered that had Umayyah asked a hundred uqiyah, he would have paid it. He was not buying labour. He was buying the freedom of a believer.

He kept doing it. He freed Amir ibn Fuhayrah. He freed women whose suffering brought him no advantage at all. One woman, Zinnirah, had been beaten until she lost her sight, and her tormentors mocked her, claiming the idols had blinded her for leaving them. She answered that the idols could neither harm nor benefit anyone, and her sight was later restored to her. Another was a slave girl of Umar ibn al-Khattab, in the days before Umar was Muslim, when he would beat her until he was too tired to continue, telling her he stopped only out of exhaustion, not pity. Abu Bakr bought her freedom too. One day Umar and Abu Bakr would be the two elders of the community, inseparable, but in those early years one of them was buying a beaten girl out of the cruelty of the other.

His own father, not yet a believer, could not understand it. People buy slaves who are strong, he told his son, or skilled, or who keep the others in line. Why spend your fortune freeing the weak ones who can do nothing for you? Abu Bakr's answer was the whole of him in a single sentence: O my father, I seek only what is with Allah. He had entered Islam with forty thousand dinars; by the time he migrated, five thousand remained, the rest poured out mostly on freeing the helpless. And the Qur'an itself came down

about him in this, in Surah al-Layl, describing the most pious one who gives for one reason only:

who gives his wealth away as self-purification, not to return a favour to anyone

QUR'AN 92:18-19

The verses go on to say that such a giver acts for the sake of his Lord the Most High, and that Allah will leave him well pleased.

No person could ever repay Abu Bakr for what he did, the verse says, and so Allah Himself promised to please him. The Prophet ﷺ would later say that no wealth ever benefited him as much as the wealth of Abu Bakr, and when Abu Bakr heard it he wept and said, Am I and my wealth anything but yours, O Messenger of Allah?

The day he was beaten for the truth

He was a noble, and the nobles were not paraded and tortured in public the way the slaves were; their own tribes preferred to discipline them quietly, away from the eyes of the city, to avoid the shame of a public humiliation. But Banu Taym was small, and no one stepped forward to handle Abu Bakr. The one who took up the task was, of all people, Nawfal ibn Khuwaylid, the brother of Khadijah, a man so feared for his cruelty to the Muslims that he was called the Lion of Quraysh. He tied Abu Bakr and Talhah together with a single rope and beat them in private, and for that the two were known afterward as the two who were tied together.

But a day came when Abu Bakr's protection failed, in public, before the Kaaba. The Prophet ﷺ had been surrounded and roughed up, his clothes pulled, mocked as the man who had turned all the gods into one God. Then Uqbah ibn Abi Mu'ayt

threw a cloth around the Prophet's neck as he prayed and began to choke him. The Prophet ﷺ had ordered his followers not to retaliate, knowing his enemies wanted only the excuse of a brawl. But Abu Bakr could not stand by. He pushed through to defend his friend, crying out the words the Qur'an would honour elsewhere on the lips of another believer: Would you kill a man for saying, My Lord is Allah? That was enough to turn the crowd on him. They rubbed his face in the dirt and beat him until he lost consciousness, until his face was so swollen it could not be recognised, the few hairs of his thin beard matted with blood. Men of his own tribe, not believers, carried him home, fearing he had died.

He woke, and his first words were not about himself. Where is the Messenger of Allah? They tried to calm him. He would not be calmed until he had seen the Prophet ﷺ with his own eyes; in the end they had to carry him to the Prophet ﷺ so he could embrace him. Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) would weep when he told this story years later, and he once swore that one moment in the life of Abu Bakr was greater than the believer of Pharaoh's people, the man in the Qur'an who said the same words but concealed his faith. Abu Bakr, he said, declared his faith openly before the tyrants of his own city, and took the beating that came with it.

Second of two, when they were in the cave

When the time came to leave Makkah, the Prophet ﷺ came to Abu Bakr's house at an unusual hour, and Aishah, then a girl in that household, sensed at once that something urgent was happening. The Prophet ﷺ asked for the room to be cleared, and told his friend that he had been given permission to migrate. Abu Bakr asked one thing: the companionship, O Messenger of Allah?

Do I go with you? When the Prophet ﷺ said yes, Abu Bakr wept. Aishah said she had never before known that a person could weep from sheer joy. The most wanted man in Arabia, with every tribe hunting him, had just told Abu Bakr he would be at his side through the desert, and that was the news that broke him open with happiness.

What followed showed the shape of his love. As they walked, the Prophet ﷺ noticed Abu Bakr moving constantly, ahead, behind, to the left, to the right, and asked him why. Abu Bakr answered that whenever he thought of danger coming from one side, he placed himself there; when he feared it from another, he moved to that side. He was circling the Prophet ﷺ with his own body. In the cave of Thawr, a place so small it can barely hold two men, the Prophet ﷺ slept, and Abu Bakr saw a hole from which danger might come, and pressed his foot against it, letting the creature there sting him rather than risk waking and harming his friend. The Prophet ﷺ woke to his tears.

Then the searchers reached the very mouth of the cave. One glance down would have ended everything. Abu Bakr began to tremble, not for himself, but at the thought of harm reaching the Prophet ﷺ. And the Prophet ﷺ said to him the words that Allah preserved forever:

when the two of them were in the cave, he said to his companion, 'Do not worry, God is with us,' and God sent His calm down to him

QUR'AN 9:40

The calm that came down in that cave, the scholars note, settled upon Abu Bakr. Allah named him, in His own Book, the companion. Later on the road, exhausted and without food or

water for days, the two came upon the tent of a Bedouin woman, Umm Ma'bad, and the Prophet ﷺ milked a barren sheep by the name of Allah and offered the cup first to Abu Bakr. Abu Bakr refused; the Prophet ﷺ should drink first. Three times he insisted his friend drink first, until Abu Bakr relented. And Abu Bakr said, watching him, that when he saw the Prophet ﷺ drink and be nourished, his own hunger and thirst left him. The Prophet's thirst was his thirst, the Prophet's relief was his own.

What Abu Bakr's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read the life of Abu Bakr and to file him away as a great man, distant and finished, and to feel a warm admiration that asks nothing of us. That would be to miss what he is for. His life is not an ornament. It is a question laid against our own iman.

He believed before it was safe. The instant he heard the truth, he did not weigh his rank or his fortune or what the city would do to him; he saw what was real and committed to it. That is the marrow of faith: to trust Allah and His word before the outcome is in view, to say I believe while the cost is still unknown, instead of holding the heart back until the danger has passed. Most of us wait for certainty the world can see. Abu Bakr gave his trust first. Ask whether there is a place in your life where you already know what Allah asks, and are only waiting for it to become convenient.

He gave for no reward but Allah. He emptied a great fortune on slaves who could do nothing for him, on a blind girl, on a believer beaten in the dirt, and when his own father asked what he could possibly gain, he said only that he sought what was with Allah. The Qur'an answered him by name. This is ikhlas, sincerity, the rarest thing of all: to do a deed for Allah alone, with no eye on what people will say or repay, content that He has seen it. So look at one thing you might do today, and do it the way Abu Bakr

did, where no one will ever know, for the sake of Allah the Most High. Free someone from a burden. Cover a debt. Lift a person no one else thinks worth lifting. Seek only what is with Allah, and trust the promise that He will please those who do.

And he loved the Prophet ﷺ more than himself, which was, in the end, love for Allah who sent him. He circled the Prophet ﷺ with his body, pressed his foot to the danger, asked after him before he asked after his own life, refused even to drink before him. This love is the substance of faith, not its decoration, and it is still open to us, in our distance, through following the Sunnah he gave his life to protect, sending peace upon him, and shaping an ordinary day around what would please him. When fear closes in, hear the words that steadied the cave: do not worry, Allah is with us. The same calm that descended on Abu Bakr is promised to every believer who turns to Allah and trusts that He is near.

So carry one thing from his life into your own. Believe a little before it becomes easy. Give one thing, in secret, for Allah alone. Hold steady when fear rises, and answer it with the certainty that Allah is with us. That is how the first to follow lived, in immediate trust, in hidden sincerity, in a love that forgot itself, and it is a road still walked by anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Abu Bakr as-Siddiq, reward him for every soul he freed and every soul he brought to this religion that reached us through him, raise us upon a measure of his faith, and grant us the companionship of the Prophet ﷺ in the Gardens of Paradise.

This chapter follows the account of Abu Bakr as-Siddiq (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (92:18-19, 9:40).

Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Ali and Fatima

The First Family

There is a way of reading the seerah that turns it into a list of great men and the dates of their battles. And then there is the other way, the way that lets you stand at the edge of a room and watch a father rise from where he sits, walk across the floor, kiss his daughter on the forehead, take her by the hand, and sit her down in his own place. That is the way to understand the household of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. If this was how he treated his companions, who were not of his blood, imagine what it was to actually be his family, raised under that roof and loved by that man.

This is the story of two people who grew up inside that house, who were so beloved to the Prophet ﷺ that those around them sometimes ached with longing to be loved the same way, and who were brought together by his own hands into a home so simple it had a single bed. It is the story of Ali ibn Abi Talib and Fatima bint Muhammad (may Allah be pleased with them).

Two children of the house

To meet them, you first have to meet the poverty that shaped one of them and the sorrow that shaped the other.

Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) was born about ten years before prophethood, around the year 600, the son of Abu Talib and of a woman named Fatima bint Asad. His mother was a first

among the firsts: the first woman of Banu Hashim, the Prophet's own clan, to accept Islam, and among the first ten or eleven people to enter the religion at all. She had been a mother to the Prophet ﷺ himself, raising him in her home from the age of six. There is a quiet mercy hidden in the records: Khadijah never nursed Ali at her breast, though it would have been natural in those days, and so the bond of milk that would later have made the marriage of Ali and Fatima impossible was never formed. Allah was arranging a household before anyone could see its shape.

When the Prophet ﷺ saw that his uncle Abu Talib was crushed by poverty, he went to his other uncle, Abbas, and together they decided to lift the burden. The Prophet ﷺ took the boy Ali into his own home to raise; Abbas took Ali's brother Ja'far. So Ali came into the house of the Prophet ﷺ as a child, accepted Islam there as a child, and was one of the very first to do so. He grew up watching the Prophet ﷺ and Khadijah pray before the Kaaba, and he prayed beside them.

Fatima (may Allah be pleased with her) was the last of the Prophet's daughters, born around the very year that revelation came, near the year 610. Think of what that means. When Khadijah was running up and down the slope of the mountain in those first overwhelming days, Fatima was either an infant in the house or a child about to be born into it. Her mother named her, as Khadijah named all the girls, and the name carries its own sign. Khadijah's name meant something born early, premature; Fatima's comes from a root that means a child carried to full term and weaned, brought all the way through. The two names sit opposite each other, the premature mother and the full-term daughter. Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported the deeper meaning: that Allah had weaned Fatima and her

children away from the Fire from the day of her birth, so its punishment would never touch them.

She was the only one of the Prophet's children born and raised entirely inside Islam. Her sisters had known the days of wealth and ease before prophethood; Fatima knew none of it. Her childhood was the boycott, the hunger, the public abuse of her father, and the slow frailty and death of her mother. That childhood is the key to everything that follows.

The mother of her father

When Khadijah died, the home lost the woman who had held the Prophet ﷺ together. And it was a small girl, perhaps ten years old, who stepped into the place she left.

These were the worst years. With Khadijah gone and Abu Talib gone within days of her, the Prophet ﷺ had no protection left in Makkah. He became, as the histories bluntly put it, fair game. The scholars count at least eight times he was publicly beaten, struck, spat upon, pelted. And when he came home wounded, it was Fatima who met him, cleaned his wounds, and comforted him, a ten-year-old girl doing what no child should have to do for her father. The people of Makkah saw her closeness to him so clearly that they gave her a name for it: Umm Abiha, the mother of her father. She tended him as if she were the mother and he the child.

One scene stands above the rest for its cruelty. The Prophet ﷺ still walked alone to the Kaaba to pray, even as they kicked and mocked him. Abu Jahl, looking for a way to break him, challenged a powerful man named Uqbah ibn Abi Mu'ayt to take the filth and entrails of a slaughtered camel and dump them on the Prophet's back while he prostrated. Uqbah did it, and the

weight of it pinned the Prophet's body down. Word reached the house, and the only one there to hear it was the little girl. Fatima came running, weeping, and with her own small hands she scraped the filth from her father's back in front of the laughing crowd.

It was one of the very few times in his life that the Prophet ﷺ prayed against his enemies by name. But first he turned to his crying daughter and said the thing a believing father says: do not cry, for Allah will give your father victory. Her tears would not stop, and only then did he raise his hands against those who had humiliated him.

Another time he found Fatima in pain and asked her gently how she was. She told him the truth of a child in the boycott: her grief was deep, and there was no food, sometimes none for days. He answered her not with bread, for he had none either, but with something that would outlast hunger. He told her she was the mistress of the women of her time. With the understanding of a girl raised in the light of revelation, she pushed back: but what of Maryam, the mother of Jesus? And he taught her the difference. Maryam was the best woman of her age, and her own mother Khadijah the best of her age; among the women whose faith reached perfection, Allah had named Maryam, Asiyah, Khadijah, and Fatima. Mother and daughter, two women of complete faith.

Why Fatima, and not the other beloved daughters? Part of it, the scholars say, is simply a gift Allah gives. And part of it is exactly this: she grew up in the hardship, never tasted the wealth, and spent her childhood standing in for Khadijah and shielding her father. She resembled him more than any human being alive. Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) said she never saw anyone more like the Prophet ﷺ in the way she spoke, walked, stood,

and sat than Fatima. She was, in manner and in faith, a copy of him.

The most beloved of his family

The love the Prophet ﷺ carried for his daughter was so plain that it became a kind of gentle ache for the rest of the household.

One day Ali, with Abbas and Ja'far, came to the Prophet ﷺ with an honest question that had become a friendly argument among them: which of your family do you love most? He answered without hiding it. The most beloved of my family to me, he said, is Fatima. So as not to leave the men of his house wanting, he added that the most beloved of the young men was Usamah, the son of Zayd, the one Allah and His Messenger had favoured, and he reassured his uncle Abbas of his place too.

The way that love showed itself in daily life is almost startling. When the Prophet ﷺ left Madinah on a journey or a battle, the last person he would sit with was Fatima. When he returned, the first person he would go to was Fatima: he would go first to the mosque and pray two units, and then straight to her house, spending his time with her before he visited his own wives.

And when she came to him, he honoured her in front of everyone. Aisha described it. Whenever Fatima entered upon him, whatever he was in the middle of, he would stand up for her, walk to her, kiss her on the forehead, take her by the hand, and seat her where he had been sitting. And when he entered upon her, she would do the very same: rise quickly, hurry to him, kiss him, take his hand, sit him down in her place, and kiss his hands.

Sit with that for a moment. This was a society that, not long before, had buried its daughters alive, where a man's face darkened with shame at the news of a girl. And here was the

most honoured man among them, on his feet for his daughter, kissing her hand, teaching them without a lecture what a daughter is worth.

The proposal that almost was not spoken

By the time the family had migrated to Madinah, Ali had grown too old to live in the Prophet's house and had moved out among the young single men. Fatima remained with her father. After the great victory and great sorrow of Badr, the year her sister Ruqayyah died, the household had thinned, and Fatima was the only daughter left under that roof. Every believing heart in Madinah understood what that meant: who would not wish to marry the daughter the Prophet ﷺ loved most, the woman who was the very image of him?

At the front of the line came Abu Bakr, and then Umar (may Allah be pleased with them both), each asking for her hand. To each, the Prophet ﷺ said simply, wait, she is young, and turned the matter aside. Everyone who knew him understood the signal: if he was turning away Abu Bakr and Umar, he had someone else in mind.

Ali was certain that someone could not possibly be him. He was poor, owned almost nothing, and had watched the two greatest men of the community be turned away. The narration of how it finally happened comes down through his and Fatima's son Hasan.

People around Ali kept nudging him. An old servant woman in the house where he sat told him plainly: I think the Prophet ﷺ has his eye on you for her. He almost laughed. He turned away Abu Bakr and Umar, Ali said, and I have nothing to my name to even offer. But she insisted: go to him, and he will marry her to you. Others,

among them the chiefs of Madinah, pushed him the same way, until at last he gathered his courage and went.

He sat before the Prophet ﷺ and could not speak. Out of pure awe and love and respect, the words would not come; he stuttered, mumbled, fell silent. The Prophet ﷺ watched the most eloquent of young men sit there shaking and sweating, and asked him kindly, what brought you, son of my uncle? Do you need something? Still nothing. Then the Prophet ﷺ smiled and made it easy for him: perhaps you have come to ask for Fatima's hand. Ali lowered his head and said, yes, O Messenger of Allah. Good, came the reply. Do you have anything to give as a dowry? Ali admitted he had nothing. The Prophet ﷺ pointed to a shield that Ali owned, and told him to sell it and bring the price as her gift.

The command that the whole scene rests on had come down years before, when Allah told His Prophet to begin with those closest to him:

Warn your nearest kinsfolk

QUR'AN 26:214

When that verse was revealed, the Prophet ﷺ had stood and called out to his closest relatives by name, and among the two he named was Fatima herself: O Fatima, daughter of the Messenger of Allah, ask of me what you wish of my wealth, but I cannot avail you anything before Allah. He had taught his most beloved daughter that not even his love could carry her on the Day of Judgement; she had to answer Allah's call herself. And now that same daughter was to be married, by his own hand, into a home built on almost nothing but faith.

The simplest wedding

What follows is one of the most quietly beautiful passages in the whole seerah, because it is the founding example of how a believing marriage begins.

The Prophet ﷺ went to Fatima to ask her, for her consent was required. But she, overtaken by modesty, could not say a word either. So here was a father arranging a marriage between two young people, neither of whom could bring themselves to speak. He understood his daughter, and took her silence not as refusal but as the shyness it was. From this very moment the scholars drew a ruling: that a young woman's silence, when she is asked plainly and does not object, can stand as her consent.

Then the community came together around them, and the joy of it is felt in every detail. Ali went to the market to sell his shield. Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him), who had just become his brother-in-law by marrying Ali's sister Umm Kulthum, saw him there and bought it for four hundred dirhams, far more than its worth. Then, having paid, Uthman handed the shield back and said, this is my wedding gift to you. So Ali kept both the money and the shield. When he told the Prophet ﷺ what had happened, the Prophet ﷺ prayed for Uthman and called him the most generous of people.

The dowry, when finally set, was four hundred and eighty dirhams. Hold that number against everything the world has since done to the idea of a dowry. The gift given for the marriage of the mistress of the women of Paradise was a modest handful of silver. The Prophet ﷺ would later teach that the best of dowries and the best of weddings are the ones that cost the least, and that money spent to impress people dies the same night it is spent. The dowry was never a price. It was a gift, a

symbol of union, meant to set the tone of generosity between a husband and a wife.

The Prophet ﷺ told Ali to spend two-thirds of the silver on perfume for her and one-third on furnishings, and Bilal (may Allah be pleased with him) went with him to help, for Ali had never bought perfume in his life. Umm Salamah was asked to prepare the bride, and Abu Bakr to buy clothing. Look at what that home was: they took soft earth from the valley, cleaned it, and shaped it into cushions with their own hands, covering it with a simple cloth, and set a piece of wood in the corner to hang clothes and water-skins. The Prophet ﷺ himself made the bed, taking palm leaves and wood and stuffing a pillow of animal skin with palm fibre. He left them a pot, a water-skin, and two stones for grinding grain. That was the house of Ali and Fatima.

Ali later described it without a trace of complaint. We had one bed, he said; it was our bed at night and our couch by day, and we never had a servant in our home. And Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) said the best wedding feast he ever saw was theirs: some barley, some dates, and a little date paste. That was the meal, and it was, in his memory, among the happiest days he had ever witnessed.

The first night, and a father's prayer

On the wedding night, the Prophet ﷺ told Ali to wait, and not to be alone with Fatima until he came. Umm Ayman brought Fatima to the house, and the two young people sat there together, nervous and shaking, waiting for the man who was father, father-in-law, and Messenger of Allah all at once.

He came in and told them not to stand. He called for the water jug, made wudu, and poured some back into it. He called Ali,

poured the water over him, and prayed for him. Then he called Fatima, who came trembling with her shyness, and comforted her with words no bride could forget. Do not worry, he told her. I have married you to the most beloved person in my family, to someone special. He poured the blessed water over her too, embraced her, and made a prayer worth carrying in the heart: O Allah, bless them both, and bless what is between them, and bless their offspring.

Then he walked out, and left them to the home he had built for them with his own hands. The first family of Islam, the household within the household of the Prophet ﷺ, had quietly begun.

What the first family asks of our faith

It is easy to read all of this and feel only the warmth of it, then close the book. But a life is not given to us to admire. It is given to us as a question about our own iman.

Begin with Fatima, because her childhood is the hardest part and the most useful. She was given no gentle years. While her sisters had known wealth, she knew the boycott, the hunger, and the sight of her father bleeding and humiliated. And nowhere in all of it is there a record of her asking, why me, why this. At ten years old she was scraping filth from her father's back and being told, do not cry, Allah will give your father victory, and she grew into the woman of perfect faith. Her life asks you a direct question: when hardship comes, and it will, is your trust in Allah deep enough to hold without bitterness? Contentment with His decree is not a feeling that arrives on its own. It is something she practised as a child until it became who she was. You can begin practising it today, in the small disappointment, the unanswered need, the loss you did not choose, by meeting it the way she met hers, with patience and without a complaint against your Lord.

Then look at the marriage, and at what the Prophet ﷺ was teaching when he built that house of earth and palm leaves. The mistress of the women of Paradise began her married life with one bed, a grinding stone, and a wedding meal of barley and dates. There was barakah in that simplicity, and a warning in it too: that the money we pour out to impress people dies the same night, and that the heart of a home is not its furnishings but the prayer of blessing said over it. This is sincerity, ikhlas, worked into the very stones of a household. Ask yourself how much of what you long to own and display is truly for your good and how much is for the eyes of others. The first family shows that a life rich in Allah's blessing can be plain on the outside, and that this is not deprivation but freedom.

And do not miss the father standing up for his daughter. In a world that had buried its daughters, he rose to his feet for his, kissed her hand, seated her in his place. If you have been given daughters, or sisters, or any soul placed under your care, here is the standard, and it is worship when done for the sake of Allah and not for show: to honour them, to make them feel beloved, to refuse the casual contempt the world hands out so freely. He could not buy his daughter's salvation, and he told her so plainly, even as he loved her more than anyone. That is the balance the first family holds out to us: love people fully, serve them, honour them, and at the same time know that every soul stands before Allah alone, and that the kindest thing you can do for those you love is to turn them, and yourself, toward Him.

So take one thing from this house into your own. Meet one hardship this week without a single complaint against Allah, the way Fatima did at ten years old. Strip one piece of show out of your life and keep the deed quiet, for Him. Honour one person under your care so warmly that they feel, for a moment, the way

those around that household longed to feel. The first family was built not on wealth but on faith, simplicity, and love offered for the sake of Allah, and that way of living is still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Ali and Fatima, bless us through a measure of their faith, and gather us in the household of those He loves.

This chapter follows the account of Ali and Fatima (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (26:214). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Ali and Fatima

The House the Prophet Loved

There is a question the companions kept bringing to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, again and again, across the years. They wanted to know whom he loved most. It is a very human question, the kind a child asks a parent, hoping to hear their own name. And one day the two people with the most reason to ask brought it to him together. Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) and Fatima (may Allah be pleased with her), his cousin and his daughter, his son in all but blood and the last living piece of his first love, asked which of them was more beloved to him.

He could not lie. His heart was bound to Fatima, and she was unlike anyone to him. But he had also raised Ali in his own home, loved him as a son, chosen him as a brother. So he gave them an answer that neither could be wounded by. He looked at Ali and said that Fatima was more beloved to him, and then that Ali was more precious to him. He gave each of them something true to hold. That is where their story begins, and it is worth telling slowly, because it carries grief and tenderness in equal measure, and shows us what a household built on faith looks like from the inside.

The distance from a beloved face

The first trouble in this marriage was not poverty, and it was not an argument. It was distance. Fatima had grown up as the

daughter of the Prophet ﷺ, so close to him that the people called her Umm Abiha, the mother of her father, because she tended to him as if she were the parent. Ali had grown up in the Prophet's house too, taken in as a boy. When they married and moved into a home far from the masjid, they both felt the same ache. They missed his face.

The small homes of the Prophet's wives stood on land belonging to a man the histories almost forget, Haritha ibn Nu'man. Each time the Prophet ﷺ took a wife, Haritha would quietly give him another piece of it for a home. So when Fatima married, the Prophet ﷺ longed to have her near, but he was too modest to ask for yet more. Haritha read the longing on his face one day and asked plainly, do you miss your daughter? When the Prophet ﷺ said yes, Haritha said something that ought to be written on the heart of every generous person: by Allah, the land I give you is more beloved to me than the land I keep. Take what you wish. He offered the plot directly across from the home of Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), and the Prophet ﷺ smiled and prayed Allah would give him a palace in Paradise.

So Fatima and Ali came to live a single window away from him, for the one window in Fatima's house and the one in Aisha's faced each other across a narrow gap. The distance was closed. But the poverty was not.

A house with one bed

Ali was poor his whole life, and the Prophet ﷺ himself lived in deep poverty until the day he died. He never moved into a palace, never ate more than a simple meal in a day, often only dates and water. So this was not a father who had risen to comfort and left his daughter behind in hardship. It was a family in which everyone went without together.

The poverty in their home reached the point of physical pain. Ali developed an ache in his back from the labor. Fatima's hands blistered from the grinding, and she was exhausted. One day Ali told her to ask her father whether he might spare a servant for the house. The Prophet ﷺ often sensed what people needed before they spoke it, and Ali expected he would simply say yes. But Fatima was too shy to ask outright, so she went after the dawn prayer to inquire, and Aisha told her the Prophet ﷺ had not yet come home, for he was still in the masjid in the long remembrance he kept after Fajr. So she went back home.

When the Prophet ﷺ learned she had come looking for him, he went straight to her house and knocked at night. Ali called out, and hearing it was the Prophet ﷺ asked him to wait so they could make the house presentable. The Prophet ﷺ told them not to trouble themselves, to stay exactly as they were. Their home held a single bed that was also their couch and where they fed their animals. It was a cold night and they were wrapped in one blanket. He came in and sat between the two of them, and asked his daughter gently whether she had come looking for him that day, and what she had needed.

She told him she had hoped, perhaps, for a servant, because the work had become hard. He asked who had put the idea in her head. She would not name Ali, so she only said that someone had told her. Then he said something that must have raised their hopes, because it sounded like the beginning of a generous gift. Shall I not give you both something better than a servant?

They said of course. And he taught them words to say before sleep: to glorify Allah, to praise Him, to declare His greatness, thirty-three and thirty-three and thirty-four, a hundred upon the tongue at the close of the day. Then, still hoping, they asked

again about the servant. His answer reveals his integrity more than almost anything in this story. He could not give them a servant, he said, while the homeless who slept in the back of the masjid, and the orphans left by the Battle of Badr, were left with empty hands. He would not provide for his own daughter and leave the destitute behind. But if they said those words every night, Allah would enrich them beyond anything they were asking for.

Ali later swore that he never missed those words a single night for the rest of his life, and that he and Fatima were given a strength and a sufficiency they had not known before, until they no longer felt the need for the help they had once begged for. The Prophet ﷺ had not handed them comfort. He had handed them a door to Allah, and told them the help was on the other side of it.

What they gave away in the dark

They were poor, and they were among the most generous people in Madinah. Of course they were: she was her father's daughter, and he had been raised by the man who gave until nothing was left. Whatever entered their home often left it again before they could taste it. The scholars of tafsir relate that on one night, starving, with nothing in the house but a loaf of bread and some water, a poor family came asking, and Ali and Fatima gave it all away. To that night they connect the verses of Surat al-Insan, where Allah describes those who feed others while they themselves go hungry:

*they give food to the poor, the orphan, and the captive,
though they love it themselves, saying, 'We feed you for
the sake of God alone: We seek neither recompense nor
thanks from you.*

Read that line again, because it is the secret of the whole household: we feed you for the sake of God alone, we want no reward and no thanks from you. They were not collecting gratitude. They were not building a reputation. They gave in a poverty so sharp it had blistered their hands, and they gave it to Allah, in the dark, expecting nothing back.

This was also a house of worship. The Prophet ﷺ would knock at night to wake them for prayer in the dark, the way he himself rose to call upon his Lord.

How he settled a quarrel

Husbands and wives quarrel, even in the best of homes, and Ali and Fatima quarreled too. What matters is how the Prophet ﷺ handled it, because in-laws are so often the ones who make a small fire larger. He did the opposite.

One day he came and found Fatima alone and upset. He did not ask, where is your husband. He asked, where is your cousin, and in the choice of that word you can feel him gently lowering the temperature. She told him they had argued and that Ali had gone to sleep in the masjid, which in those days had no carpet and no comfort, only dirt. He found Ali asleep in a corner with his upper garment slipped off and sand clinging to his back.

He did not wake him with a threat. He did not play the wounded father, though he loved Fatima and could have. He knelt and brushed the dirt off Ali's back with his own hands, sat him up, put his shirt back on him, and said, get up, father of dust. Ali laughed. From that day, Abu Turab, father of dust, became the nickname Ali loved most, because it carried the memory of the Prophet ﷺ

cleaning the sand from his back and joking with him until the anger was gone. Then he sent him home. That was his version of stepping into a marriage: to restore the dignity of the one who had wandered off, and send him back with a smile instead of a wound.

Fatima is a part of me

After the conquest of Makkah, some of the elders proposed that Ali take a second wife, the daughter of Abu Jahl, to bind two powerful clans together as the customs of the time allowed. When Fatima heard of it, she was hurt. This was the daughter of the very man who had tortured her father, the man whose filth she herself had once cleaned from his back. And it hurt the Prophet ﷺ that she was hurt.

He stood and spoke to the people. He would not forbid what Allah had made lawful, he said. But Fatima was a part of him, and what harmed her harmed him, and it was not fitting for the daughter of the Prophet of Allah and the daughter of the enemy of Allah to be joined to one man at once. The scholars note how much she had already lost by then: the only one of his daughters still living, she had buried her mother, Khadijah, and buried her sisters. Anything that would deepen that grief was not to be laid upon her. Ali, who loved her, did not pursue it. The hint of harm to her was enough to move the Prophet ﷺ to speak, and enough for Ali to let it rest.

For the love between them was real, and it deepened over ten years. Ali was a poet, and he wrote verses for her. Once he saw her using a siwak, the little toothstick from the arak tree, and he turned even that into tenderness, scolding the siwak itself, asking how it dared to touch her. It was not jealousy gone wrong. It was a husband finding a way, in the eloquence of his people, to tell

his wife how treasured she was, and it touched her deeply. She teased him too, insisting she was older than him while he insisted otherwise, and they would laugh about it. The Prophet ﷺ would pass their house, hear the laughter, and ask what had caused it so he could share it.

Their children became four of the most precious people in the Prophet's life. When Hasan was born, Ali named him Harb, war, and the Prophet ﷺ said no, his name is Hasan, goodness. When Husayn was born the next year, Ali named him Harb again, and again the Prophet ﷺ gave him a name of good instead. He would prolong his prostration in prayer because Hasan had climbed onto his back and he would not disturb him. He would pause a sermon, come down from the pulpit, and gather both boys into his lap. Once, wrapped in a wide cloak, he opened it for Hasan, then for Husayn, then drew Fatima in, then Ali, and held all four under it at once, praying that Allah would purify the people of his household. He would tell Fatima to call his two sons so he could squeeze them and smell their hair.

The last thing he whispered

Near the end, returning from a journey, the Prophet ﷺ went first to the masjid and prayed, and then to Fatima before his own home, because a father checks on his daughter first. She welcomed him as she always did, kissing his head and his hands and seating him in her place. And then she began to cry. She told him he had grown pale, that his clothes were worn, that he was not eating. This was still the girl who had wiped the dirt off his back in Makkah and wept over his suffering. He comforted her as he always had, telling her not to cry, that Allah had sent her father with a message that would reach every house on the face of the earth, every town and village and tent in the desert. It would be

worth it in the end. And because Fatima's faith was her own, not borrowed from her father's station, that was enough to settle her heart.

Then came the day he was dying. The fever burned in him, and he drifted in and out of consciousness, unable to rise. Fatima walked into the room. Every time before, he had risen to take her hand and seat her in his place. He could not. And yet, Aisha said, he found more strength in that moment than in all those final days. He stirred himself to greet his daughter, smiled, and signaled her to sit at his right. Then he whispered something in her ear, and she wept bitterly. He whispered something more, and she laughed, embraced him, and left the room in joy.

Aisha asked her what he had said, and Fatima would not tell. It is between me and my father, she said. Only later did she share it. The first whisper was that he would not live past this illness, and she had wept. The second was that she would be the first of his family to follow him, and that was what made her laugh. She was twenty-seven, a young mother, and there was nothing wrong with her. But the promise that she would soon be with her father again was the best news he could have given her. That is how much she loved him.

He died in her lap. As the angel came, he raised his hand and said that he chose the companionship of the Most High, and his hand fell. Fatima, in the house a single window away, was the first to hear, and she cried out words that were grief and faith at once: O my father, how near you are now to your Lord. O my father, to Jibril we announce your passing. O my father, the highest garden of Paradise is now your home.

Ali could not speak. For days, the most eloquent of men found no words at all. When they buried the Prophet ﷺ, Fatima stood

behind them and asked how they could bring themselves to put dirt over her father's face. Anas, who was there, told her the truth: the only way they could do it was to deny their own hearts, to make themselves numb, because no heart could bear it whole. She wept, and turned away.

She did not have the desire to live after him, and she did not live long. In the very first Ramadan after his death, the month that must have ached with the memory of him leading them in prayer, she went out to her courtyard on the third day, lay back, and looked up at the sky, smiling. She called for Asma bint Umays and asked to be buried at night, beneath a cloth wide enough to conceal her, so that her modesty would be kept even in death. She called Ali, shared their last moments, and asked him to marry her sister's daughter Umamah afterward, so that a loving woman would care for Hasan, Husayn, Zaynab, and Umm Kulthum. Then, with a light on her face and peace in her, she left the world looking at the heavens, the first of the Prophet's family and his close companions to follow him, exactly as he had promised her.

Ali washed her body and wept as he washed her, and he had to do what the Prophet ﷺ had once done for Khadijah: descend into the grave to receive her and lay her in the earth. He led her funeral prayer himself. He said later that nothing in his life had ever exhausted him as the loss of these two within so short a time, not the battles, not the leadership, not the trials that came after. At her graveside he recited a poem of pure pain, asking why he should stand greeting the buried when his beloved would not answer, hearing in his imagination her reply that the dirt had veiled her from those she loved. There was no comfort in it, no promise of reunion, nothing but raw grief. And that grief was itself a form of his love. He had not turned bitter against Allah; he knew how death and the afterlife work. But patience was never

the absence of pain. Patience is to say nothing except what pleases Allah, and to carry the love forward into good done for the one you lost.

What the life of Ali and Fatima asks of our faith

It is easy to read a household this luminous and feel only that we could never reach it. That is the wrong lesson. Their home was made extraordinary not by wealth, for they had almost none, but by what they did with poverty, with love, and with grief, and every one of those is within your reach.

Start with the night they gave away their only bread. They did not feed the hungry from a surplus, and they did not do it to be seen. They said it out loud, even if only to Allah: we feed you for the sake of God alone, we want no thanks from you. That is ikhlas, sincerity, the thing that turns an ordinary act into something Allah Himself records in His Book. You do not need to be rich to practice it. Give one thing this week, quietly, to someone who can never repay you, and refuse the small reward of being noticed for it. Let it be between you and Allah, and trust that what the people never saw, He saw completely.

Then take the servant they asked for and never received. They wanted relief, which was reasonable, and instead the Prophet ﷺ gave them words to say before sleep and a promise that Allah would provide. Ali kept those words every night for the rest of his life, and found a strength he had not had before. There is a quiet teaching here about where we run when life grows heavy. We run to circumstances, to more help, more money, more ease. He taught them to run to Allah first, to glorify and praise and magnify Him at the close of every hard day. Tonight, before you sleep, say those words and mean them, and watch what Allah does with a heart that turns to Him instead of away.

And take Fatima's laugh. A dying father told a healthy young woman that she would soon die too, and she laughed, because it meant she would be with the one she loved. That is not morbid. It is the fruit of a faith so settled that the nearness of Allah and His Messenger was sweeter to her than the life she was being asked to leave. Most of us fear death because we are unsure what waits on the other side, or because we have given our hearts so fully to this world that leaving it feels like loss. Her life asks a simple, searching question: whom do you love, and where is your heart truly set? If you love Allah and long for His company and the company of His Prophet ﷺ, build that love now, in prayer, in the words you say at night, in the people you keep close for His sake, so that when your own time comes, there is something in you that can smile.

And take Ali's grief. His pain at the grave was not weakness of faith but the cost of having loved truly, for Allah does not ask us to feel nothing. He asks us to keep faith inside the feeling, to say only what pleases Him, and to carry our love into good done for His sake. That is a way still open to anyone who wants it: to love deeply, to give in secret, to lean on Allah when the work breaks your hands. May Allah be pleased with Ali and Fatima, gather us upon a measure of their love and their sincerity, and join us with them and with His Prophet ﷺ in the highest garden of Paradise.

This chapter follows the account of Ali (RA) and Fatima (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (76:8-9). Where the

histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Ali ibn Abi Talib

The Lion of Allah

He was a boy of perhaps eight or nine when the household around him began to change. He could not have named what was happening. He only knew that the man and the woman he lived with, the two people he loved and trusted most in the world, had started to stand together in the dark and bow their heads to something he had never seen. He waited until they had finished, and then he walked up and asked the only question a child could ask: what is this? The answer he received was not softened for him. It was the call to worship Allah alone, given to him with full seriousness, as if his soul were already a grown man's. And from that night, the first young man in the history of this religion began to pray.

His name was Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him), and to understand the courage that would one day make him the Lion of Allah, you have to begin with the house that raised him and the mother who carried him there.

The house of poverty, the woman who fed it

Ali was the youngest of four sons of Abu Talib, the brothers spaced roughly a decade apart: Talib, then Aqil, then Ja'far, then Ali. Their father's given name was Abd Manaf, though the world remembered him by the name of his eldest son. Theirs was a house pressed hard by poverty, and it never truly left them,

clinging to the family through the years of Ali's childhood and staying with them, in one form or another, even into Islam.

His mother was Fatimah bint Asad, and her place in this story is larger than is usually told. She was the first woman of Banu Hashim to accept Islam, among the very first ten or eleven souls to embrace the message at all. When the Prophet ﷺ told her, she did not hesitate for a moment. She had always sensed there was something set apart about him, and she had reason to: she had raised him. From the age of six until he married Khadijah at twenty-five, the Prophet ﷺ grew up in her care, and he never forgot it. He remembered the days of hunger when she would keep only a little food for herself and divide the rest among her children and the orphan she was raising. He called her his mother, and when she lay dying he wrapped her in his own shirt and made supplication at her bedside until she passed with her eyes on his face, then climbed down into her grave himself to receive her body. This was the woman who named her son Asad, a lion, the name his father later changed to Ali while away on a journey, never knowing her instinct would be proven true. Years on, the Prophet ﷺ would call her son Asadullah, the Lion of Allah, for the way he carried himself in battle. A mother's intention, set aside at birth, returned to him as a title of honour.

There is a quiet miracle hidden in how Ali came into the Prophet's home at all. When a famine struck Makkah and large families suffered most, the Prophet ﷺ, newly married and now able to give, went to his uncle Abbas with a plan to ease Abu Talib's burden: each of them would take one of his sons to raise. Abu Talib agreed, on the condition that they leave him Aqil. So the Prophet ﷺ took up the infant Ali and held him close, and Abbas took Ja'far. It could so easily have gone another way. The Prophet ﷺ might have adopted Ali, as he did Zayd; Khadijah

might have nursed the child, which would have made Ali her son in the law of milk kinship. Either path would have closed forever the door to the marriage Allah was quietly preparing, the marriage of Ali to Fatimah. Neither happened, and the histories give no reason. It was simply decreed, early and unseen, that this boy would grow in the Prophet's house as near as a son and yet remain free to become far more.

The first young man to believe

So Ali was inside the household on the night that everything began. He saw the Prophet ﷺ come home from the cave shaken; he saw Khadijah steady him; he watched, as a child watches, the change come over the home he lived in. When the command to pray descended, the Prophet ﷺ and Khadijah began to pray together at night, and the boy waited until they finished and asked, "O Muhammad, what is this?"

The answer was the heart of the whole religion: "This is the religion of Allah, which He has chosen for Himself and with which He has sent His messengers. I call you to Allah alone, with no partner beside Him, and to reject Lat and Uzza." The Prophet ﷺ did not talk down to him. He pressed the full seriousness of the message onto a child of eight or nine, and the child took it seriously in return. Ali did not say, "This looks interesting, let me join in." He said, with a maturity beyond his years, "This is something I have never heard of before today. I cannot decide this without speaking to my father, Abu Talib." The Prophet ﷺ smiled, and asked only one thing of him: if you do not accept this, keep it to yourself.

That night Ali could not sleep. The words turned over in him until they settled into his heart. He had grown up in a house that never worshipped an idol, so there was no idol to abandon, only a truth

to embrace. By morning he had decided. He went to the Prophet ﷺ, asked him to repeat the call once more, and when he heard it again said simply, "I submit." He never did go to Abu Talib first; he had heard the truth and could not wait. The Prophet ﷺ received revelation on a Monday; Ali accepted Islam on the Tuesday. He was the first young man, the first child, to believe.

The boy who walked beside the Prophet ﷺ

In the early days the call was quiet, given at private meals where the Prophet ﷺ would speak softly to a few relatives of Banu Hashim at a time. Ali went along on those errands. Sometimes it was only the two of them; sometimes Abu Bakr came too. The boy did not speak; he was too young to argue with grown men. But he was there, watching how the message was carried.

Then came the day on the hill of Safa, when the Prophet ﷺ broadened his call into the open. He gathered the clans and asked: if I told you an army was massing behind that mountain to attack you, would you believe me? Of course, they said, you are as-Sadiq al-Amin, the truthful one, you have never lied to us. Then he warned them of a punishment to come, called them to the worship of Allah alone, and asked: who will support me in this? A silence fell over the crowd. These were the same people who had just sworn they would believe him, and now not one of them moved. They loved him too much to insult him, and they were too far from his message to follow it.

And then one hand went up. It was the boy's. "O Messenger of Allah," Ali said, "I will support you." It changed nothing in the crowd, and it changed everything in him. The only one who rose to stand with the Prophet ﷺ in that public moment was a child. Abu Lahab cursed his nephew: may you perish, is this why you

gathered us? The people walked away. The Prophet ﷺ was left standing, and the boy walked home beside him, unharmed in body but already tasting the loneliness the message would bring. From those days on, Ali would later say, the people of Makkah would turn their faces away from the Prophet ﷺ as he passed, while every stone and every tree gave him greetings of peace.

The boy had sharp eyes and a gift for reading people, and the Prophet ﷺ put it to use. Ali would stand near the Kaaba and study the faces of travellers, watching for anyone who looked as though they had come seeking the new message, so he could quietly guide them. It was through Ali, watching the crowd, that Abu Dharr al-Ghifari found his way to Islam.

There is a scene from those years that the heart should slow down to picture. A merchant named Aftif al-Kindi came to Makkah in the days before Islam and lodged with Abbas. One noon, with the sun at its peak, he passed the Kaaba and saw something he could not explain: a young man facing the House with his hands raised, a boy beside him raising his hands the same way, a woman standing behind them, and all of Makkah ignoring them. He watched them bow and prostrate together, then went to Abbas. That is my nephew Muhammad, Abbas told him, who claims his Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth and has commanded him to this religion, and beside him is his cousin Ali, and behind them his wife Khadijah. By Allah, there is no one on the face of the earth who follows this religion except those three. Aftif went on with his trade. Years later, when Islam had grown, he became a Muslim, and for the rest of his life he would weep and say: I wish I had been the fourth. He could have been the fourth person on the earth to bow to Allah, and he had walked past it.

One of the early scholars compared that scene to a much older one: Ibrahim and Hajar and the infant Ismail, a prophet with his wife and his child, standing alone before the House of Allah and calling on Him when no one else did. Once again, a prophet, his wife, and his child stood before that House, declaring the oneness of their Lord while the world turned its face away.

The night he lay in the Prophet's bed

The first great test of Ali's courage came on the night the Prophet ﷺ left Makkah. Seven clans had conspired to murder him, a youth chosen from each so that the blood would be shared among them all and no single tribe could be held to account, snuffing out any chance of revenge. On the eve of his departure, the Prophet ﷺ asked Ali to sleep in his bed in his place.

Think about what was being asked. The Prophet ﷺ knew the assassins were coming. Ali's presence would give them a body to see in the dark, buying the time the Prophet ﷺ needed to reach the cave with Abu Bakr. And the men outside were no longer making idle threats; they were killing believers by then. If they pulled back the cover and found a young man who was not their target, they would very likely kill him anyway. His protector Abu Talib was dead, and he came from a poor family with no power to avenge him. By any reckoning, lying in that bed was lying down to die.

Ali did it without a flicker of hesitation. He would later say that he slept that night as he had never slept before, deeply and at peace, while outside the house men gathered to break in and kill whoever lay beneath the blanket. This is what trust in Allah looks like when it is total. Abbas would say that Ali ransomed every part of his body from the Fire that night by putting all of it on the line for the Prophet ﷺ. The same tranquillity Allah sent down upon

the Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr in the cave, He sent down upon the heart of this young man in the bed. When the men finally rushed in and pulled back the cover and saw it was not the Prophet ﷺ, they recoiled in disgust, and Ali simply rose and walked away, untouched.

Even then the demands on him were not finished. Before leaving, the Prophet ﷺ had charged Ali with a task that says everything about the character of the man they were trying to kill: to remain behind and return the trusts. The people of Makkah, the very people plotting the murder, had left their valuables in the Prophet's safekeeping, because even as they hated him they knew he was honest, and he would not leave their property unreturned. So Ali stayed, gave back every trust to its owner, and only then set out. He made the migration alone, on foot, with no companion and no camel, too poor to afford a mount, sleeping through the punishing heat of the day and crossing the wilderness by night. The Prophet ﷺ waited at the outskirts and went out looking for him, the last to arrive because he had come the whole way alone, and embraced him when at last he appeared.

Brother, son-in-law, and the one beloved to Allah

In Madinah the Prophet ﷺ joined the believers in pairs of brotherhood, and he took Ali as his own brother. There were thirty years between them, and Ali had grown up in his house almost as a son, yet the bond was that of brothers, easy and warm. The histories preserve the way they joked. Ali, who took up labouring jobs to feed himself, once worked a whole day for a woman and was paid twelve dates. Knowing the Prophet ﷺ was hungrier than he was, he set six before him and kept six for himself. When the companions gathered around, Ali pushed his

own six date-pits over in front of the Prophet ﷺ and announced, "Look at the Messenger of Allah, he eats and leaves me hungry." The Prophet ﷺ laughed and answered, "Look at Ali, when he eats his dates he swallows the pits." His tender nickname for Ali was Abu Turab, the father of dust, and despite the gap in age, the Prophet ﷺ sought his counsel as he sought few others'.

After the Battle of Badr, Ali married Fatimah, the Prophet's daughter, and so the one raised like a son became also a son-in-law. We will come to that marriage in its own place. What the histories make plain is the rank Allah gave this man. Imam Ahmad observed that no companion of the Prophet ﷺ had more authentic narrations spoken in his praise than Ali. To love him took nothing away from Abu Bakr or Umar or the rest; the believers saw no contradiction in it. Drawing on the truth that Allah is the protector of the believers, the Prophet ﷺ said of Ali, "Whoever takes me as his mawla, then Ali is his mawla."

God is the ally of those who believe: He brings them out of the depths of darkness and into the light. As for the disbelievers, their allies are false gods who take them from the light into the depths of darkness, they are the inhabitants of the Fire, and there they will remain.

QUR'AN 2:257

When the Prophet ﷺ set out for Tabuk, he left Ali behind in Madinah to care for the women and children, as he sometimes did precisely because Ali was trustworthy and beloved. The hypocrites seized on it and mocked him, whispering that he had been cast aside, and it began to trouble him. When the Prophet ﷺ returned and saw it weighing on him, he said, "Are you not content, Ali, that you are to me as Harun was to Musa, except that there is no prophet after me?" Musa, when he went to his

Lord, had left Harun in charge of his people. It was not a setting-aside; it was a trust given to the one most fit to hold it.

The signs of his standing came again and again. The hypocrites of Madinah could be known, Abu Sa'id reported, by their hatred of Ali, and Ali himself said the Prophet ﷺ had told him that none but a believer would love him and none but a hypocrite hate him. At Khaybar the Prophet ﷺ said he would give the banner the next day to a man who loved Allah and His Messenger and whom Allah and His Messenger loved, and every man there longed to be the one. In the morning he called for Ali, who was suffering so badly in his eyes that he could not see. The Prophet ﷺ applied his own blessed saliva to them, his sight returned clear again, the banner was placed in his hands, and Allah granted victory through him. And on the day of Badr, the Prophet ﷺ told Abu Bakr and Ali that one of them had Jibril at his side and the other Mika'il, the day the angels were sent down to support the believers.

What Ali's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like Ali's and feel mostly awe: the boy in the deadly bed, the warrior who stepped forward when grown men hung back, the Lion of Allah. Awe is a poor place to stop. His life is not a statue to admire from a distance; it is a set of questions laid against our own faith.

Begin where he began, with belief that did not wait. A child heard the truth, lost a night's sleep turning it over, and submitted by morning, before his father knew, before it was safe, before anyone else his age had done it. He did not delay until the religion was popular and the cost was low. Compare him to Aftif al-Kindi, who saw the same truth at the same Kaaba and walked on, meaning to come back when it was easier, and spent the rest of

his life weeping that he had not been the fourth. Both saw clearly. One acted and one postponed. Our own postponements wear ordinary clothes: the prayer we will start praying properly later, the sin we will leave when the time is right, the turning to Allah we keep meaning to make. Ali's life asks whether you will answer the call you have already heard, today, or keep telling yourself there is time.

Then there is the bed. To lie down in the place of a hunted man, certain that killers are on their way, and to fall into the deepest sleep of your life, is not the absence of fear. It is the presence of something larger than fear. Ali was in complete reliance upon Allah, and so the same tranquillity that descended on the Prophet ﷺ in the cave descended on him in the bed. Most of us are kept awake by far smaller things: money, reputation, the worry of what tomorrow holds. His trust did not remove the danger; it removed the terror, because he knew Whose hand the outcome was in. That kind of trust is built, not wished for, by handing Allah the small fears first, until the heart learns that He is enough.

Look, too, at the trusts he stayed behind to return. The men who had left their property with the Prophet ﷺ were the same men plotting to kill him, and still he would not let a single deposit go unreturned. There was no one to applaud the honesty and every excuse to abandon it. This is ikhlas worked into the smallest corners of conduct: to be exactly as upright with people who wrong you as with people who watch you, because you are doing it for Allah and not for them. Ask where, in your own dealings, you would quietly cut a corner if you knew no one would notice. That hidden place is where your sincerity is really tested.

And notice how he carried being overlooked. Left behind at Tabuk and mocked for it, he felt the sting, as anyone would, until

he was told that this was his Harun, a trust and not a slight. So much of our discontent comes from feeling unseen, passed over, given the smaller part. His life answers that the worth of your role is set by the One who assigned it, not by the crowd that misreads it. The quiet duties, the work no one praises, may be exactly the trust your Lord has measured out for you, and your contentment with it is itself an act of worship.

There is one concrete thing to take from him into an ordinary week. Do for the sake of Allah a duty that brings you no credit and may even bring you mockery: keep a promise that has become inconvenient, return what you owe in full when you could quietly shave it, take the unseen task and do it well. Do it the way Ali lay in that bed and stayed behind for those trusts, with the outcome left to Allah and the watching of people forgotten. That is how the first young man to believe lived, in courage that came from trust and in honesty that owed nothing to applause, and it is a way still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Ali, the Lion of Allah, raise us upon a measure of his courage and his trust, and gather us in the company of those whom Allah and His Messenger love.

This chapter follows the account of Ali ibn Abi Talib (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The Qur'an translation is from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (2:257). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Umm Ayman

The Woman Who Never Stopped Caring

There is one person in all of history who can claim a thing no one else can. She was there when the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ came into this world, the very first pair of hands to hold him, and she was still there, alive, when he left it. Companions who loved him deeply knew him for a season. His wives knew him as a grown man. His Companions knew the Messenger. This woman knew the newborn, the orphan, the boy, the young husband, the Prophet, and the dying man, and she stood watch over every stage of it. She held him at his first breath in this life, and she outlived his last.

Her name was Barakah, and the world came to call her Umm Ayman (may Allah be pleased with her).

A girl carried into the house of the Prophet's father

She was born around the year 557, roughly thirteen years before the Prophet ﷺ, in Abyssinia, in what is today Ethiopia. She came to Makkah the way far too many human beings came to Makkah in the days of ignorance: through the slave market, sold in a place called Suq Ukaz. Of all the people in that market, one girl was purchased and carried into one particular household. The buyer was Abdullah ibn Abd al-Muttalib, and the household was the one in which the Prophet ﷺ would soon be born.

So picture the home before the world had ever heard of it. Abdullah, newly married. His wife, Aminah bint Wahb. And a single young servant girl named Barakah, the only servant brought into that house. These were the people who lived under one roof when the story began.

Then Abdullah set out on a trade journey north to Sham, to Greater Syria, the route the Makkans took in the summer. He left without knowing that Aminah was carrying a child. And while he was gone, Aminah saw a dream: a light came from her body and lit up the hills and valleys all the way to Sham. There was only one other person in the house to tell, and so she told Barakah. The girl listened and offered the only thing she could, a hope: perhaps this is a blessed child, perhaps good news is coming. She noticed her mistress growing ill in the mornings and thought, gently, that these might be the signs of a pregnancy. They were.

Every single day, Barakah was sent out to the place where the caravans returned from Sham, to watch for Abdullah. And through those months she kept Aminah company on the long, lonely days, telling her stories of Abyssinia, of the things she had seen and heard, easing the waiting of a pregnant woman whose husband was far away. Until the day she went out to watch and was told that the caravan had returned, and Abdullah had not. The father of the Prophet ﷺ had died on the road.

It fell to Barakah to carry that news home. It fell to her to sit with the grieving widow and console her. And it fell to her, a few months later, to be the only other person in the room when Aminah went into labour. So the first human being ever to hold the Prophet ﷺ was this Abyssinian girl. She would later say that when he was born she saw a light come out from the house, and she understood at last what her mistress's dream had meant. She

cleaned him, and lifted him, and placed him in his mother's arms. She is one of only three women authentically reported to have nursed him, alongside his mother Aminah and, later, Halimah as-Sa'diyyah in the open desert.

The boy who lost everyone but her

When the Prophet ﷺ was six years old, Aminah took him on a journey, and on the way she fell ill. Now hold the scene in your mind. The same woman who had caught him at birth was sitting beside his dying mother, and the boy was watching it happen. Aminah, in her last moments, whispered to Barakah a trust that would define the rest of her life: take care of him as if you are his mother. Care for him. Stay with him. See to it that he knows no sadness beyond this one.

So Barakah was there at the very beginning of his life, and she was there at the death of the only parent he had ever known, a six-year-old orphan who had never met his father and was now burying his mother before his eyes. She comforted him. She was nineteen, and she was now the one constant figure he had in the world.

Then he was taken into the home of his grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib. And when the boy was nine, his grandfather died too, and once again Barakah was there to console him. She had been present at his birth. She had been present at his mother's death and his grandfather's death. Through all of it she did not leave.

Technically she had passed to him as part of an inheritance. But the Prophet ﷺ freed her. She was no longer property, no longer bound to anyone. And when he grew into a man and married Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (may Allah be pleased with her), he introduced this freed woman with words he would repeat for the

rest of his days: "She is my mother after my mother." Not a servant to be overlooked. A mother.

"I never left him, and he never left me"

She had given her whole youth to one family, and now the Prophet ﷺ gently told her it was time to live for herself. He had married, he said, and she had not, so perhaps she should think about marriage now. She refused. She wanted to stay with him and Khadijah and go nowhere. He pressed her: you have spent your youth in this service, now go and have a life of your own. Khadijah added her own kindness, promising to find her the best of men and to pay for the whole wedding herself, just as Khadijah used to do for the poor women of Makkah who could not afford to marry.

It was then that Barakah said the line that holds her entire life in a single breath: "I never left him, and he never left me." That was who she was. She had never once stepped away from his side, and he had never once let her fall away.

In the end she agreed, and Khadijah found her a noble man, Ubayd ibn Zayd, from the Khazraj tribe of Yathrib. They married before Islam, and she had a son. His name was Ayman, and from him she took the name the ummah would always know her by: Umm Ayman, the mother of Ayman. The boy would live to see Islam, believe in it, and one day die a martyr. Her husband, though, died before the message ever came, and so she returned with her son to the household of the Prophet ﷺ and Khadijah.

The woman from Paradise

When revelation came and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ received his Lord's word, Khadijah believed, and then this woman

believed. She is counted as the second woman to accept Islam. She did not hesitate. Anyone who had known his character the way she had, who had watched him grow from infancy, answered the call the moment they heard it.

A widow now, growing old, with only her son beside her, she might have seemed to the world a woman with no prospects. But the Prophet ﷺ said something about her while they were still in Makkah. He said that whoever wished to marry a woman from the people of Paradise should marry Umm Ayman. Think of how the world would have weighed her: no famous lineage, no wealth, an older widow, a former slave. And here was the Prophet ﷺ calling her a woman of Paradise.

One man heard it and rushed forward. Zayd ibn Harithah (may Allah be pleased with him), at least twenty years younger than her, said simply that if she was bound for Paradise he wished to marry her, so that he might be in Paradise with her. There is a quiet symmetry to it that is easy to miss. Zayd, too, had been bought from that same market and freed, and the Prophet ﷺ loved him as a son. Barakah had been bought and freed and become a mother to him. The freed son married the freed mother. She was past the age of bearing children, yet Allah blessed them with a boy, Usama ibn Zayd, "the beloved, son of the beloved," whom the Prophet ﷺ loved as his own and would one day place in command of the Muslim army.

A bucket from the sky, and a heart that never complained

When the migration to Madinah came, Umm Ayman was an old woman, reaching seventy, and she made the difficult journey anyway. On the road she ran out of water. The fear crept in that she would die of thirst. And then, she says, as the sun set she saw a bucket come down to her from the heavens on a rope, and

by Allah, she could not see where the top of that rope reached. She drank from it. When her thirst was gone there was still water left, and she poured the rest over herself to cool her body in the heat.

What she said next is the part to hold onto. After that day, she said, she would fast on the hottest of days, she would make tawaf under the burning sun, she would do all of it, and by Allah, she never felt thirst again for the rest of her life. The reward of the migration was woven into her very body. Fasting became the easiest act of worship she had, because her Lord had provided for her on a hard road travelled for His Messenger's sake.

When she reached Madinah her feet were swollen and her face was covered in dust. The Prophet ﷺ looked at her in that state and told her that she had a place in Paradise. It was the second time he had given her that glad tiding to her face, this worn, dust-covered woman who had crossed the desert without a word of complaint.

The eye that watched over him

She did not stay home with the women. Umm Ayman went out to the battles of the Prophet ﷺ, and her role in them is one of the most moving images of her life. She moved about the battlefield keeping her eyes fixed on him, the way a mother watches a child she cannot bear to lose, making sure no harm reached the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. When the fighting ended she tended the wounded, bandaging them, even tearing from her own clothing to wrap their injuries.

At the Battle of Uhud, when many fled and the Prophet ﷺ was exposed, she was among those who seized a sword and stood swinging it at his side while others ran. Her whole life had

become his life. He used to look at her and say, "This is the entirety of what is left of my family." He called her his mother. He introduced her as his mother after his mother. He said she was all that remained to him.

He visited her every single day. On one of those visits he asked her, "How are you, mother?" Listen to her answer, because it is the centre of everything she was. She said: as long as Islam is well, I am well. As long as your message is protected, I am fine. There was no list of complaints, though she had every grounds for one: the swollen feet, the failing eyes, the long road, the home she had left behind. She simply told him that her well-being was tied to the well-being of his cause. That was the comfort she gave him, the assurance that she had his back, always, no matter what he needed.

She was, of all the Companions, the one who could make the Prophet ﷺ laugh. Her Arabic was poor, for she was from Abyssinia, and her tongue would sometimes twist a phrase into its opposite. Once she greeted him with words that came out meaning peace not be upon you, simply because she struggled to pronounce the greeting, and he kindly taught her she could just say the shortened form. On a day of battle, meaning to call out a prayer that Allah make the people's feet firm, she said something with no meaning at all, and he looked at her and laughed and told her, gently, to be quiet, that her tongue was a rough one. Another time she came and asked him to carry her, meaning to give her a mount, and he teased her that he would give her the child of a she-camel. She protested that a baby camel could never carry her, until he asked her: and is there any camel that is not the child of a she-camel? He joked with her, and called her mother, and was comforted by her, and she looked at him always with the eye of a mother's love.

But in the serious moments she followed him through and through. When a small child of his lay dying, the Prophet ﷺ held the little one to his chest, and the child died in his arms, and his eyes filled with tears. Umm Ayman, present in the room, began to weep at the sight of him weeping. He asked her why she was crying. She answered: why should I not cry when I see you crying? He told her that he was not weeping in protest; this was mercy. He was crying from compassion and love, not from any questioning of his Lord's decree. And he taught her, in that moment of shared grief, that the believer is in a state of good in every situation, content with Allah no matter what befalls, in praise of his Lord even as the soul is drawn from the body.

The silence after, and the grief that surprised everyone

When the Prophet ﷺ died, it is a wonder she did not die with him. Her entire purpose in this world had been defined by the moment she first held him. Now she withdrew. She fell quiet. She no longer joked, no longer spoke much, and kept her distance from the crowds. The only person who had been in the room when he was born now watched from afar as an ummah of a hundred thousand wept and lowered him into the earth.

Hers was a life that buried nearly everyone she loved, one after another. Her first husband. Her son Ayman, martyred at Hunayn. Her second husband, Zayd ibn Harithah, martyred at Mu'tah. The Prophet ﷺ himself. And then her son Usama. Some scholars say she lived to be a hundred years old, long enough to see the caliphates of Abu Bakr and Umar, and to bury, one by one, every person who had ever been dear to her.

After the Prophet's death, Abu Bakr and Umar (may Allah be pleased with them) went together to visit her, just as he used to visit her, to help her grieve. When they sat with her she began to

cry. They assumed, naturally, that she wept for missing him, and they tried to console her: do you not know that what Allah has prepared for the Prophet ﷺ is better than what he had here? She answered that she knew this well, and that this was not the reason for her tears. Then why are you crying, they asked. She said: I am crying because the revelation from the heavens has ceased. And at that, Abu Bakr and Umar broke down too, and the three of them wept together for a long while. The fresh word of Allah had been descending through that man they loved, and now the sky was silent. She grieved not only the man but the open channel between earth and heaven that had closed with him.

She died around twenty days after Umar was assassinated, and she was buried in al-Baqi, the graveyard beside the mosque of the Prophet ﷺ. Those who buried her made sure to lay her directly in line with his grave, facing the qiblah as he faced it, so that even in the earth she rested adjacent to the one she had watched over all her life.

What Umm Ayman's life asks of our faith

It would be easy to read this and feel only tenderness, to love the image of the old woman with the rough tongue who made the Prophet ﷺ laugh. But her life is not here to be admired and set aside. It is a question put to our own iman, and the question is sharp.

She gave her whole life to a cause and never once asked it to repay her. Think of what she had grounds to complain about: she had been torn from her homeland and sold, she had buried her husbands and her sons, she had crossed a desert as an old woman until her feet swelled, her eyes failed her, and still, when the Prophet ﷺ asked how she was, she said that as long as Islam was well, she was well. That is the heart of sincerity, ikhlas, the

rarest thing of all: to be devoted to something greater than yourself for the sake of Allah, and to find your own well-being inside His cause rather than inside your comfort. Ask yourself honestly, when the work of faith becomes hard, when the people of the masjid frustrate you, when serving Allah costs you sleep or money or ease, what comes out of your mouth? Her answer is the one to learn. I am well, as long as His cause is well.

She trusted Allah on the road and He provided from where she could not see. The rope of that bucket vanished into a sky she could not trace, and she drank, and she was never thirsty again. That is what trust in Allah looks like in an ordinary life: you set out on the hard, obedient path, the path of migration, of fasting, of standing in prayer, of doing the right thing when it costs you, and you do not see how it will be made bearable, and then Allah makes it bearable from a source you never expected. He turned her hardest act into her easiest worship. He can do the same with yours. Take up one act of obedience you have been avoiding because it seems too heavy, and trust that the One who sent water down a rope can carry you through it.

And she was content with His decree even in tears. She learned at the Prophet's side that weeping is not the same as questioning, that a believer can grieve and still be in a state of good, still in praise of his Lord while the soul leaves the body. Most of us confuse pain with complaint, and let our sorrow curdle into a quarrel with Allah. She did not. When hardship comes to you, and it will come, her life asks whether your heart can break and still say, He is well, His decree is good, the believer is in good in every situation.

There is one more thing, quiet but enormous. The world saw a former slave, a woman, foreign, poor, with no tribe to her name

and a tongue that stumbled over Arabic. And the Prophet ﷺ raised her up and called her his mother before all of them, so that society had to look at the very woman it would have overlooked and see in her a mother of the Messenger of Allah and a woman of Paradise. Allah does not weigh us by the things people weigh: not lineage, not wealth, not language, not standing. He weighs the heart that never stopped caring for His cause. So care. Take one person the world overlooks and honour them this week for the sake of Allah. Give one act of devotion that no one will applaud. Hold steady through one grief without a word of complaint against your Lord. That is how Umm Ayman lived, in quiet service, in trust, in contentment, and that road is still open to anyone who wants to walk it. May Allah be pleased with Umm Ayman, who never left him and whom he never left, and may He gather us beside her and beside the Prophet ﷺ in the highest gardens of Paradise.

This chapter follows the account of Umm Ayman, Barakah bint Tha'labah (RA), in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). The transcript cites no Qur'anic verse by chapter and verse, so none is quoted here; the words attributed to the Prophet ﷺ are reported in the hadith literature as relayed in the lecture. Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Khadijah bint Khuwaylid

The First to Believe

Before there was a single mosque on the earth, before one verse had been recited in public, before any human being had said the word "Muslim," there was a woman in Makkah who looked at a trembling, frightened man, the most truthful man she had ever known, and told him, without a moment of doubt, that God would never abandon him. She was right. And in being right, in being sure of him before he was sure of himself, she became the first believer in the history of this religion.

Her name was Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, and to begin to understand the weight of what she carried, you have to meet her before the revelation ever came.

A woman ahead of her time

She was born around the year 555, fifteen years before the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, into a noble house of Quraysh. Her father, Khuwaylid, was a chief of Banu Asad, one of the men who had once stood ready to defend the Kaaba. Her lineage met the Prophet's own at their shared ancestor, Qusayy ibn Kilab.

Even her name carried a sign. Khadijah was not a common name among the Arabs, who tended to recycle the same names across generations. It means, in its root, something born early, premature, ahead of its time. Her family gave it to her at birth, and she spent her life making it true.

Long before Islam, the people of Makkah had a second name for her: Tahirah, the pure one. It was said of her that she never lied, never backbit, never wounded or shamed anyone. She refused to bow to the idols her city worshipped, in an age when that refusal was rare and quietly dangerous. Wealth, beauty, and standing tend to harden a person. In her they did the opposite. They made her gentler, and more generous.

And she was wealthy. Widowed twice before the age of twenty-five, she inherited and then grew a fortune into the largest trading caravan in all of Makkah. It was said that her single caravan equalled the caravans of the rest of Quraysh combined, that she sent hundreds of camels along the routes to Syria and Yemen. Over the roof of her house flew a pavilion of green silk, and it was not a flag of her wealth. It was a sign to the poor of the city: here is a house that will help you. She paid the dowries of those who could not afford to marry. She carried the debts of the struggling. She fed the orphan and the widow. A woman who had every reason the world recognises to be proud chose, instead, to be of service.

Why she chose him

Tired of merchants who cheated her, Khadijah went looking for one honest man to carry her goods north to Syria. She was pointed toward a young man the whole city already trusted, a shepherd known by a single title: al-Amin, the trustworthy. She hired him, and sent her servant Maysarah along to watch.

Maysarah came back with more than profit, though there was profit. The young man had doubled her caravan. But Maysarah spoke of his character on the road, of how he would not swear by the idols Lat and Uzza when the traders pressed him, of a stillness and an honesty he had never seen in a man. Something

in Khadijah, the woman who had refused the idols all her life, recognised something in him.

When the matter of marriage was gently raised, the Prophet ﷺ wondered aloud why a woman of her rank would even consider him. She had already turned away proposals from some of the most powerful men in Makkah, men whose names would later become bywords for hostility to the message. She had wanted none of them. When she told the Prophet ﷺ why she wanted him, she did not mention his lineage, though it was noble, or his appearance, though he was beautiful. She said it was for two things: the nobility of his character, and the truthfulness of his tongue.

She was about forty. He was about twenty-five. For the next twenty-five years, until the day she died, he married no one else. Years later, when revelation had long since come, the Qur'an would describe the One who had quietly arranged all of this, the One who had taken an orphan and a poor man and, through this woman, settled him:

Did He not find you an orphan and shelter you? Did He not find you lost and guide you? Did He not find you in need and make you self-sufficient?

QUR'AN 93:6-8

Their home was full. Children of their own, and others they took in: a young man named Zayd ibn Haritha, whom the Prophet ﷺ freed and loved as a son, and his young cousin Ali. In fifteen years of marriage before the revelation, they argued only once, and the argument tells you everything about both of them: she had asked him to attend a family gathering, and he would not go, because the idols would be honoured there. Even then, before a

word of Qur'an had been revealed, he could not bring himself near them, and she loved him for it.

The cave, and the arms that held him

By his late thirties, the Prophet ﷺ had everything a man of Makkah could want. A devoted wife. Beloved children. Wealth, peace, and the deep respect of his people. And it was exactly then, at the height of an untroubled life, that the dreams began. For six months he saw true dreams, visions that came to pass exactly as he had seen them. Then came a love of solitude, a pull toward the cave of Hira on the mountain above Makkah.

The climb to that cave takes the better part of an hour even today, on a paved path. There was no path then. And Khadijah, by now a woman in her fifties who had borne many children, made that climb herself, carrying food and water up the mountain so that her husband would not have to break his retreat and come down. No one asked her to. It was simply who she was: a woman who exceeded every expectation placed on her, and most that were not.

Then, in that cave, the angel Jibril came to him for the first time, and the weight of it nearly crushed him. He came down the mountain shaking, and burst into their home with the only words he could find: "Cover me. Cover me." She wrapped him and held him and asked nothing, not where he had been, not what had happened, until the trembling eased. And when he could finally speak, he confided the thing he feared most. Not the angel. Himself. He was afraid he had lost his mind, that something had taken hold of him.

In that single moment, Khadijah held the future of the message in her hands. One wrong word, one flicker of doubt from the person

who knew him best, and a frightened man might have broken. She did not waver for an instant. "No," she said. "Never. Rejoice. By God, God would never disgrace you." And then she told him why, and her reasons are worth hearing, because they would one day be echoed by the Qur'an itself: you keep the ties of kinship; you speak only the truth; you carry the burdens of others; you give to the destitute; you honour your guest; you stand by those struck with hardship.

Listen to what Allah would later call true goodness, revealed years after she had already named it in her husband:

The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day... who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travellers and beggars... who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true.

QUR'AN 2:177

She had read his character and described righteousness before the verse of righteousness came down. Then she did something even wiser. She did not simply comfort him; she investigated. When he saw the angel again, she asked him to tell her, and she tested what he was seeing, until she was certain it was an angel and not a devil. Her faith was not blind. It was the faith of a clear, careful, intelligent woman who looked closely and then committed completely.

And in her arms, with the fear still leaving him, came the next revelation, the command that would not let him rest again:

*You, wrapped in your cloak, arise and give warning!
Proclaim the greatness of your Lord; cleanse yourself;*

He said to her, "You are the first I am calling to this." She answered, without hesitation, "And I am the first to accept it." She prayed the first prayer at his side. She made the first tawaf with him. She was the first soul in all of creation to answer the call of Islam.

Everything she had

Belief, for Khadijah, was never only words. As the message spread and the persecution grew, she poured her great fortune into the cause of God until almost nothing was left of it. And when Quraysh moved to crush the Prophet's clan, declaring a total boycott, cutting them off from food and trade and herding them into a barren valley, Khadijah was not even required to suffer it. She belonged to a different clan. She could have stayed in the comfort of her own home and supported him from a safe distance.

She chose the valley.

A woman who had spent her entire life in elegance and ease now lived among the starving. She used what remained of her connections to smuggle in what little food she could, and then gave that food away to others. She grew thin. She grew frail and sick. And in all of it, through hunger and illness and the slow loss of everything she had once owned, there is not a single narration of her complaining. Not once did she ask, "Why is this happening to me? Why did you bring this on us?" She had given her wealth, her comfort, and her health to Allah, and she considered His cause worth all of it.

Heaven noticed. The angel Jibril came to the Prophet ﷺ with a message meant for her alone: that Allah Himself was sending Khadijah His peace, and that Jibril sent his peace too, and that she was to be given the glad tidings of a house in Paradise made of a single hollowed pearl, in which there would be no noise and no weariness, ever again. She was, in all likelihood, the first person in this ummah ever to receive salaam directly from her Lord. The scholars reflected on the gift of that house of pearl: she had given away all her own pearls for the sake of Allah, and there was no noise and no exhaustion in it because she had never once raised her voice at him, nor ever wearied him. When the greeting reached her, this dying woman, eating grass to survive, answered, "Allah is peace, and to Jibril be peace, and upon you, Messenger of Allah, be peace."

The Year of Sorrow

She died around the year 620, in what the books call the Year of Sorrow, only days after the death of Abu Talib, the uncle who had protected him. The Prophet ﷺ lowered her into the grave with his own hands, the same arms that had once reached for her in terror now laying her body to rest. Those around him feared his grief might take him too.

He never forgot her. Not once. Years later, after Badr and Uhud and the long road to victory, our mother Aisha (RA) said that not a day passed without him mentioning Khadijah. He would slaughter a sheep and send portions to her old friends, for her sake. Once, hearing a voice that resembled hers, his face changed with longing. When prisoners were brought after the battle of Badr and he saw a necklace that had belonged to Khadijah, sent to ransom her daughter's husband, he wept, and asked that it be returned.

When Aisha, in a moment of very human jealousy, asked whether Allah had not given him someone better than that old woman, his answer was firm and final: "She believed in me when no one else did. She accepted me when the people rejected me. She supported me with her wealth when others held back. And Allah gave me children through her." And in another narration, the simplest and most tender thing a person can say about another: "I was blessed with her love."

When at last he returned to Makkah in triumph, to the very city that had driven him out and broken her health, the people offered him their finest homes. He did not take them. He pitched his tent on the open ground near her grave.

The first of many firsts

Hers is a long list of firsts, and it is worth saying them plainly. The first to believe. The first to pray beside the Prophet ﷺ. The first to make wudu, and the first to make tawaf, at his side. The first in this ummah to receive salaam from Allah, and from Jibril. And she reached all of it without ever seeing the religion take its final shape. She never prayed the five daily prayers as we know them. She never fasted an obligatory Ramadan. She never saw Madinah. Her entire share of Islam was its hardest, loneliest, earliest years, and she gave herself to them without holding anything back.

When the people of Makkah counted their great names, hers was never on the list. When Allah counted the first of the believers, hers was the first name of all.

What her life asks of our faith

It is tempting to read a life like Khadijah's and feel only admiration, to set her on a shelf so high that she has nothing to ask of us. That would be a loss. Her life is not a monument to be admired. It is a question put to our own iman.

She believed before she had proof. When her husband sat shaking, uncertain of himself, she was already certain, because she had spent years watching a truthful man and she trusted what she knew. That is the heart of faith: to trust Allah and His promise before the outcome is visible, to say "I believe" in the dark and not wait for the light to make it easy. Most of us withhold our hearts until we are sure it is safe. She gave hers first.

She gave everything and asked nothing back. Her wealth, her comfort, her health, her standing, all of it went quietly into the cause of Allah, and she never tallied it, never reminded anyone, never asked the world to notice. That is sincerity, ikhlas, the rarest thing: to do the deed for Allah alone and be content that He has seen it, even when no one else ever will. Ask yourself how much of what you do is done for the eyes of people, and how much you could do the way she did, in silence, for Allah.

She was steadfast when it cost her everything, and she never complained of Allah's decree. Hunger did not turn her bitter. Loss did not make her doubt. She held to contentment with her Lord in the valley of the boycott the way she had held to it in the days of her wealth, because her peace was never in her circumstances; it was in Allah. When hardship comes to you, and it will, her life asks whether your trust in Allah is strong enough to survive the loss of the very things you think you need.

And here is the part that should lift your heart: nothing she did for Allah was ever lost. The world mocked her, starved her, and

buried her in sorrow, and meanwhile her Lord was sending her His own greeting of peace and preparing for her a house of pearl. What looked, from the streets of Makkah, like a noble woman who had thrown her life away on a doomed man, was in truth the most successful life imaginable. This is the promise that should change how you spend your days: what you give to Allah, He keeps. What you suffer for Him, He sees. What the world calls loss, He may be recording as the very thing that saves you.

So take one thing from her into your own ordinary life. Believe in Allah's promise a little before it becomes easy. Give one thing for His sake that no one will ever know about. Hold steady through one hardship without a word of complaint to Him. That is how the first believer lived, in private, in sincerity, in trust, and it is a way still open to anyone who wants it. May Allah be pleased with Khadijah, raise us upon a measure of her faith, and gather us in the company of the first to believe.

This chapter follows the account of Khadijah (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (93:6-8, 2:177, 74:1-5). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Waraqa ibn Nawfal

The First to Confirm Prophethood

There is a man who appears at the very opening of the most famous account of how revelation came to the earth, and then almost immediately disappears. A trembling Prophet ﷺ, just returned from the cave, is brought by his wife to an old, blind man who listens to the whole story, names what has happened, weeps for what is coming, and dies a few days later. He arrives at the start of the story only to exit it. We are told nothing of his long life before that moment, only the moment of his death.

His name was Waraqa ibn Nawfal (may Allah be pleased with him), and his story is one of the most quietly moving in the whole seerah, because almost everything he prepared for, he prepared for in the dark, with no promise that he would live to see it.

The noble of the noble

To understand him, you have to place him in Makkah before any of this began. Waraqa was Waraqa ibn Nawfal ibn Asad. Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her) was Khadijah bint Khuwaylid ibn Asad. Nawfal and Khuwaylid were brothers, sons of Asad, which made Waraqa her first cousin. But Nawfal was the eldest of Asad's sons and Khuwaylid the youngest, so the gap in age between Waraqa and Khadijah was at least twenty-five or thirty years. He was her cousin in lineage but, in truth, more like an uncle. He stood in her life as an elder.

His family was among the most noble of Makkah, descended directly from the great ancestors of Quraysh, and within that noble house Waraqa himself was reckoned the most noble. His character was high, his manners refined, his standing beyond dispute. Because of all this, before the Prophet ﷺ ever entered her life, Waraqa had been the natural, expected match for Khadijah. By family, by lineage, by character, by every measure the Arabs counted, the two of them were the best of their people, and the world assumed they would marry.

He refused it. He chose not to marry at all. He took up the life of a worshipper, what the Arabs would call a priest or a monk, and gave his days to the pursuit of truth. He was an ascetic. He spent his days in worship and his journeys in travel and study. He did not haunt the marketplace the way his peers did. He ate once a day, only enough to keep himself, and dressed in plain clothes. He came from a rich tribe and wanted none of its wealth. He set aside everything Makkah prized so that nothing would stand between him and the thing he was searching for.

A man searching for the way of Ibrahim

Waraqa was not alone in his search, but he was rare. In the years before Islam, while the city worshipped its idols, there was a small handful of men who turned away from all of it and went looking for the pure monotheism of Ibrahim (peace be upon him). Four of them became known: Ubaydullah ibn Jahsh, Uthman ibn al-Huwayrith, Zayd ibn Amr, and Waraqa ibn Nawfal. They are sometimes loosely called the Hanifs, those upon the upright way of Ibrahim, the worship of the one God. Three of the four eventually became Christian, including Waraqa. Only Zayd ibn Amr stayed simply upon the way of Ibrahim, refusing to take on any of the later forms.

Waraqa and Zayd ibn Amr were the two who travelled together to Syria to study, to learn Christianity and Judaism, to deepen their grasp of the Abrahamic way and to prepare themselves for what they sensed Allah had promised that land. But Zayd ibn Amr died about five years before the Prophet ﷺ received revelation. So in Makkah, as the appointed hour drew near, Waraqa was the only one of the four still present and still waiting, the lone seeker in the city who had spent his whole life getting ready for a prophet he believed was coming.

What set Waraqa apart was the shape of his patience. Zayd ibn Amr had been combative, openly confronting his people over their idols, insisting upon the truth in their faces. Waraqa did not do that. He kept his distance from the idolatry without quarrelling, certain in himself that Allah would clarify the matter in its time. He kept to himself, kept his dignity, and waited. Khadijah too had always had an aversion to the idols and never worshipped them, and so had a few others of pure instinct. But Waraqa carried something more: deep learning. He knew Hebrew. He could read and write, a rare thing in that society, and rarer still in two languages. Khadijah herself later described him as a man who had become Christian, who wrote the scriptures in Hebrew, writing from the Gospels as much as Allah willed him to write.

He was so learned that even the pagans came to him. They did not share his beliefs, but they recognised a man who had studied language and religion and philosophy, and so they brought their dreams to him to be interpreted. This is the man Makkah knew: a noble elder, an ascetic, a scholar of scripture who had read more deeply than anyone around him, blind in his last years, and waiting.

The dream of the sun

Long before the marriage, when Khadijah was still a young woman, she had a dream. She saw the sun descend from the sky and come down into her own house. She did not know what to make of it, so she carried it to the one man whose reading of such things the whole city trusted. She told Waraqa, and he told her that perhaps she would marry a man of great nobility, or, he said, perhaps even a prophet. He named the possibility out loud: that the sun coming into her home might be a husband of the highest rank, or it might be a Nabi, a prophet of Allah.

It is worth pausing on how strange and how precise that was. Years before there was any revelation, the man who would one day confirm the Prophet ﷺ had already told Khadijah that a prophet might enter her life. He was not guessing wildly. He had spent his life studying the signs, and he sensed the nearness of what was coming. Around the Prophet ﷺ himself, signs had gathered his whole life. As a boy travelling to Syria with his uncle Abu Talib, a monk named Bahira had seen the seal of prophethood on his back and warned that the trees and the stones had bowed as the boy passed, that this was the leader of the worlds, and that he must be taken home and guarded. Years later, when the Prophet ﷺ carried Khadijah's own caravan to Syria, her servant Maysarah came back with the same kind of report: a cloud that shaded him, a tree that bent its shade over him as he slept, and a monk who said that only a prophet rests beneath that tree. The land to the north still held the remnant of the people of the Book, the monks and priests who recognised the signs. Waraqa was the one such reader who lived inside Makkah itself.

When the proposal finally came, it was Waraqa who conducted the marriage of the Prophet ﷺ to Khadijah, with her eldest surviving uncle acting as her guardian, for a modest dowry of

five hundred dirhams. He was, after all, the nobleman of the family, the one who understood scripture, the elder whose word carried weight. His connection to this household, and to the Prophet ﷺ, ran back long before the moment we all know.

"This is the same angel"

Then came the morning that the whole seerah turns upon. The Prophet ﷺ came down from the cave of Hira shaking, the weight of the first revelation still on him, and Khadijah, after she had calmed him, knew exactly where to take him. It was her own good instinct, her fitra, that brought him to Waraqa, acting, before a single verse had commanded it, in the spirit of what Allah would later reveal:

[Prophet], all the messengers We sent before you were simply men to whom We had given the Revelation: you [people] can ask those who have knowledge if you do not know.

QUR'AN 16:43

She brought him to the old, blind man in his nineties and said, "O son of my uncle, listen to the son of your brother." Waraqa turned to the Prophet ﷺ and asked him, "O son of my brother, what do you see?" He asked it the way he would ask anyone who came to him, assuming this too was a dream to be read. And the Prophet ﷺ told him everything he had seen in the cave.

Waraqa did not hesitate. "This," he said, "is the Namus that Allah sent down to Musa." The word he used means the one who bears secrets, and he meant Jibril, the same angel who had come to Musa (peace be upon him). Then he said it plainly: "You are the prophet of this people." He knew it was coming, and now it had come, and he knew the man. And in the same breath, before the

Prophet ﷺ could even absorb the first announcement, Waraqa said something astonishing for a man of his age and his frailty: "I wish I were young. I wish I could be alive when your people drive you out."

The Prophet ﷺ was stunned. He had just been told he was a prophet, and now he was being told his people would expel him, and he could not imagine it. He had never had a single complaint raised against him. He was the city's peacemaker, the one who reconciled warring tribes, the man everyone trusted. "Will they drive me out?" he asked. And Waraqa answered, "No man has ever come with what you have come with except that his people took him as an enemy." It was not personal, he was saying. It is never the man they hate. It is the message he carries that the world cannot bear.

Then this blind man, nearly a hundred years old, made his promise: "If I live to see that day, I will support you with all my strength." Khadijah had just told her husband that Allah would never disgrace him, and now Waraqa, in the same room, was already pledging his own strength to the day the people would try to.

He asked for strength, not for ease

Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) reports that Waraqa died only a few days later. The revelation paused for a time, and he was gone. He did not live to give a single day of the support he had promised. And yet that promise is one of the most beautiful things in his whole life, precisely because of how he made it.

Notice first that he wanted to be a disciple. Waraqa did not only recognise the signs of prophethood; he knew the worth of those who stand beside a prophet in his hardest hour. He had read how

it went for the ones who came before, for Isa (peace be upon him) and his loyal followers, and he wanted to be counted among them. After almost a century of preparing, he wanted to be the companion who shared the burden, who stood at the Prophet's side when the people came for him. That was the deepest desire of a life spent waiting.

Notice, too, the exact words of his request. He did not ask Allah to lighten the load. He asked for the strength to carry it. He did not say, "I hope Allah makes this easy," or, "I am old, we will not be able to bear this." He asked Allah for the power to bear it with all his might, because he wanted the full reward of standing with the Prophet ﷺ, not a discounted share of it. That is the mark of his sincerity. A man whose faith was lip service would have offered comfort and excuses. Waraqa offered his strength.

And do not imagine, because he died peacefully in his bed, that the burden he was reaching for would have been light. The powerful of Makkah were not spared the persecution; they were tortured in private, within their own clans, to keep the shame inside the tribe and to deter their own from following Islam. Had Waraqa lived, his voice, with all the authority and reverence he commanded, lent to the call of the Prophet ﷺ, would have been a danger the leaders could not tolerate. They might well have killed him quietly and called it a natural death. Allah, in His wisdom, kept this man alive just long enough to see the prophet he had waited for, to confirm him with his own tongue, and to die before the storm. It is as if his whole long life had been held open for that single morning.

A believer in the gardens of Paradise

So what does it mean to die a few days after confirming the Prophet ﷺ? Was Waraqa a Companion or not? Was he the first

man to believe, or does that title belong to Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him)? The scholars differed. Some said he confirmed the prophethood but did not live to join the formal community of Islam, and so was a believer but not technically a Companion. Some said he died in the pause of revelation and reached the same conclusion. Others wrote whole treatises arguing that he was indeed the first male Companion of the Prophet ﷺ. The disagreement itself tells you how unusual his case was.

What is not in doubt is the answer the Prophet ﷺ himself gave when Khadijah, anxious for her cousin, asked about his fate. This was a man who had believed in her husband, confirmed him, and then died before the message went public. The Prophet ﷺ told her that he had seen Waraqa in a dream, dressed in white garments. Had he been among the people of the Fire, he said, he would not have seen him in that state. In another narration he said he saw Waraqa in the midst of Paradise, wearing silk. And once, when he heard a man speaking ill of Waraqa, the Prophet ﷺ said, "Do not say anything bad about Waraqa," and told them he had seen Waraqa in not one garden but two, two gardens of Paradise.

That detail echoes a promise in the Book of Allah:

For those who fear [the time when they will] stand before their Lord there are two gardens.

QUR'AN 55:46

The Prophet ﷺ said the very same of Zayd ibn Haritha and of Waraqa, that each had two gardens. One reflection on it is that these were men who believed twice over: once before the Prophet ﷺ had even come, when they held to monotheism while

their whole world bowed to idols, and again when they were told the prophet had arrived. That second belief was no small thing. There were men in Madinah who had waited for a prophet and then, when they learned it was Muhammad ﷺ of Banu Hashim, refused him. Waraqa did not refuse. The instant he heard the account, he said, "It is you. You are the prophet of this people."

The last witness of Isa, the first witness of Muhammad ﷺ

There is one more turning in this story so beautiful that it is hard to read it without pausing. The very last mention of Isa (peace be upon him) in the Qur'an, if you read the Book from front to back, comes in Surah As-Saff, and it is Isa himself foretelling the one who would come after him:

Jesus, son of Mary, said, 'Children of Israel, I am sent to you by God, confirming the Torah that came before me and bringing good news of a messenger to follow me whose name will be Ahmad.'

QUR'AN 61:6

The last word of Isa in the Qur'an is the announcement of the Prophet ﷺ. And the first man to confirm the Prophet ﷺ in Makkah was the lone follower of Isa in that city, an old Christian who had spent his life upon the way of Ibrahim and Isa, waiting. The glad tidings that Isa carried, the good news of the one to come, were handed across the centuries and received by Waraqa, who looked at the trembling man before him and said, "It is you." Then he died, and the story of the Prophet ﷺ picked up exactly where Isa had left off, carrying forward the legacy of Ibrahim (peace be upon him). It was not a pagan of Makkah who first confirmed him. It was the last witness of the prophet before him.

What Waraqa's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like Waraqa's and feel its strangeness, an old blind man who appears for one scene and is gone. But his life is not a curiosity to admire from a distance. It is a question put to our own iman.

He prepared his whole life for a moment he was never promised he would see. Decade after decade, he set aside marriage, wealth, comfort, and the easy approval of his people, all to be ready for a prophet whose coming he believed in but could not guarantee. He did the work in the dark. And when the moment came, it lasted a few days, and then he died. The world would call that a poor return on a lifetime. Allah called it two gardens. Here is what his life asks of you: are you willing to do the quiet, faithful work for Allah without the guarantee of seeing the harvest? To pray, to give, to keep yourself pure, to prepare your heart, when there is no promise that you will live to see the reward in this world? Waraqa's life says that the preparing is itself the worship, and that Allah does not waste a single day of it.

He asked for strength, not for ease, and that single choice is one you can make today. When hardship is coming, the soul's first instinct is to ask Allah to lift it away. Waraqa asked instead for the power to carry it, because he wanted the full reward of bearing it for Allah's sake. That is a different relationship with your Lord altogether. It is the faith that does not flinch from the cost of the message, that would rather be strengthened than spared. The next time you are afraid of a burden, you can pray as Waraqa prayed: not "make it light," but "make me strong enough to carry it for You."

And he loved the truth more than he loved being right in the eyes of his people. He was the noble of the noble, the man everyone

respected, and he could have guarded that standing by staying silent and aloof. Instead, when the prophet came, he spent his reputation in a single sentence: "You are the prophet of this people, and they will drive you out, and I will stand with you." Sincerity, ikhlas, is exactly this: to want what Allah wants more than you want the world's good opinion, and to say so out loud when it costs you. Ask yourself how much of your silence is wisdom and how much is fear of losing your place.

So take one thing from Waraqa into an ordinary day. Do one act of preparation for Allah that no one will reward you for, and do not need to see where it leads. Ask Allah, in your next hardship, for strength rather than escape. And when you know what the truth is, be willing to say it, even when it costs you something to be the one who says it first. He was the last to follow the prophet before, and the first to confirm the prophet to come, and Allah seated him in two gardens for a faith the world never saw the use of. May Allah be pleased with Waraqa ibn Nawfal, grant us a share of his patient sincerity, and gather us with him and with the prophets in the highest of those gardens.

This chapter follows the account of Waraqa ibn Nawfal (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (16:43, 55:46, 61:6). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

Zayd ibn Amr ibn Nufayl

A Nation of One

In a city that had buried the religion of Abraham under three hundred idols, there was one man who stood with his back against the Kaaba, looked out at the crowds streaming past, and said aloud what no one else in Makkah would say: that not a single person there was upon the way of Ibrahim except him. He had no scripture. He had no teacher he fully trusted. He had no prophet to follow and no community to belong to. He had only a conviction that the truth was one, that it was old, that it had been lost, and that he would rather be hated and alone than join the worship of stones. He would die before the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was even told that he was a prophet. And yet, on the Day of Judgment, he will be raised as a nation all by himself.

His name was Zayd ibn Amr ibn Nufayl, and his is a story unlike any other in the history of this religion.

The four who refused

To understand Zayd, you have to understand the strange thing that happened in Makkah a generation before the revelation. The city was drowning in paganism. The Kaaba that Ibrahim (may Allah have mercy on him) had raised for the worship of the one God now had idols crowded around it, and the rites he had established for pure monotheism had all been turned into festivals of idol worship and commerce. And in the middle of all

of this, four men looked at it and concluded, each on his own, that something was deeply wrong.

They were not prophets, and they received no revelation. They were simply men whose hearts could not accept that this was the truth, and who decided among themselves that they would not follow the dominant pagan culture of their city. They called themselves Hunafa, monotheists, seekers after the religion of Abraham. One of them, Uthman ibn al-Huwayrith, became a Christian and disappeared into the lands of Rome. Another, Ubaydullah ibn Jahsh, also took up Christianity, then accepted Islam and migrated to Abyssinia, though the histories carry a contested report about how he ended. A third, Waraqah ibn Nawfal, immersed himself so deeply in the Torah and the Gospel that he became a learned priest.

Three of the four found their resting place in some form of Christianity. Only Zayd refused them all. He looked at the Judaism and the Christianity of his time as he found them, and he was not satisfied. He would take from each whatever he judged to be from the way of Abraham and leave the rest, insisting, against everyone, on being simply a follower of Ibrahim. Not a Jew, not a Christian, not a pagan. A man of the original religion, holding to it alone in a city that had forgotten it.

The meat he would not eat

Zayd was from Banu Adi of Quraysh, a clan of standing, and he was the paternal first cousin of a young man named Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him). He was significantly older than the Prophet ﷺ, and the Prophet ﷺ, growing up, knew him and was fascinated by him.

This was before any calling had come. The Prophet ﷺ never worshipped idols, but he had not yet been commanded to challenge them, and so he did not. The wisdom of that is its own quiet lesson: for forty years the Prophet ﷺ built a reputation so spotless that, when the call came, he could turn to his people and ask them to trust the man they had always trusted. Had he confronted them earlier, he might have met exactly the fate that Zayd met. But Zayd had taken a harder road. He did not merely abstain from idolatry. He challenged it, openly, alone.

There is a scene the Prophet ﷺ himself remembered. He was in a gathering near a place called Tan'im, close to Makkah, and meat was being served. The Prophet ﷺ passed it by. When the food reached Zayd, he refused it and said he would not eat what had been slaughtered in the name of their idols, only what had been slaughtered in the name of Allah. And he did not stop at refusing. He turned it into a rebuke. This animal, he told them, was provided by Allah. Allah created it, sent down the rain and the growth that fed it, and made it fit to eat. And then you take it and sacrifice it in the name of something other than the One who gave it to you. What is wrong with you people?

There is an even more personal moment, narrated by Zayd ibn Harithah, the freed servant the Prophet ﷺ loved as a son. He said that the Prophet ﷺ met Zayd ibn Amr in that same area, and the Prophet ﷺ was the one serving food. Zayd ibn Amr did not respond with anger. He saw a noble young man, and he liked him. He said to him gently, "O son of my brother, do not eat from this. It was slaughtered in the name of other than Allah." Zayd ibn Harithah said that from that day on, the Prophet ﷺ never ate from the meat sacrificed to the idols of Quraysh, nor served it. An old man, decades before the revelation, advising the future

Messenger of Allah ﷺ to keep clear of the idols, and the Prophet ﷺ carrying that counsel with him.

This is the food Zayd refused. Listen to how the Qur'an would one day name the same God Zayd was defending, the same purity of worship and sacrifice that Zayd was reaching for in the dark:

Say, 'My prayers and sacrifice, my life and death, are all for God, Lord of all the Worlds;

QUR'AN 6:162

The lone voice at the Kaaba

Zayd would stand in front of the Kaaba, lift his hands, and say, "O Allah, I bear witness that I am upon the religion of Abraham." Picture it. The idols ringed the sanctuary, the crowds moved among them, and one man stood there with his hands raised, testifying to a God none of them truly worshipped.

Asma bint Abi Bakr (may Allah be pleased with her) remembered the sight when the season of Hajj came around, the season that, for Makkah, was all commerce and corruption and idols dressed up as devotion. She remembered the strange figure of Zayd, putting his back against the Kaaba and calling out to the crowds, "O assembly of Quraysh, by Allah, not one of you is upon the religion of Abraham except me." It was a sharp thing to say, because Quraysh prided themselves on Abraham. They knew he had built that house. They kept his image on the walls inside it. They called themselves his descendants. And here was a man telling them to their faces that they had abandoned the very thing they boasted of.

What did they do? They treated him as a madman. They mocked him, ignored him, and walked on. He was not breaking their idols or attacking them with his hands. He was only speaking, only refusing, only standing where they could see him and saying that they were wrong.

Then Asma described something that is almost unbearably tender. Zayd would prostrate toward the Kaaba. He had no revelation, no Book, no Prophet to teach him how to pray, and did not know the form of bowing or prostration that would later be given. But something in him, some intact and undamaged instinct, pulled him to put his face to the ground before his Lord. And he would weep as he did it. Asma, a curious girl, listened, and heard him say:

"O Allah, if only I knew which of the ways is most beloved to You, I would worship You by it. But I do not know." And then, as if offering an excuse to his Lord, he added, "But I worship You like this."

I will prostrate, and hope that I am right.

There is no scene in the whole story of the Companions quite like it. A man straining toward Allah with nothing to guide him but a heart that would not let go, doing what he could and asking forgiveness for what he did not know. While Makkah had taken every rite of Abraham and turned it into idolatry, Zayd was trying, alone and weeping, to put them back the way they were meant to be.

What it cost him

A man cannot say such things in such a place without paying for it. The one who took it upon himself to break Zayd was his own uncle, Al-Khattab, the father of Umar. First he cursed him, then

spat at him, then beat him, then set the thugs of the city on him, telling them that if they ever saw Zayd return to Makkah, they were to beat him and teach him a lesson. Al-Khattab was a proud man, and Zayd's challenge to the rites was an unbearable affront to that pride. So Zayd, who had harmed no one, could no longer enter his own city except in secret, slipping in and out under threat of violence.

You can see, in this, where the young Umar first learned how to deal with the call to one God. It was Al-Khattab's way: you have a problem, you crush it. That is the same instinct that would one day send Umar toward the Kaaba with a sword to kill the Prophet ﷺ, and toward his own sister's house, where he beat her husband for accepting Islam. And that husband was Sa'id, the son of Zayd ibn Amr. The father was beaten for his monotheism by Al-Khattab; the son was beaten for his monotheism by Umar. But that second beating would end with Umar himself in tears, accepting Islam, and becoming one of Sa'id's closest companions.

The Prophet ﷺ once went up to Zayd, in those years when he had no idea what his own future held, and asked him plainly, "Why is it that your people hate you so much?" Imagine the question. The Prophet ﷺ, who would himself one day be driven from this very city, asking an old man who was already being driven from it. Zayd answered, "O son of my brother, it is because I have left their religion and their idols for the religion and the God of Abraham." His whole life had become a single sentence: my Lord is the Lord of Abraham, my religion is the religion of Abraham. People urged him to become a Jew or a Christian and took him to rabbis and priests. He would not. He held every one of them up against his measure of Abraham, and finding them wanting, he kept walking.

The girls he kept alive

Here is where the story turns, and where you begin to see what real, undamaged faith does to a person when it is left to grow on its own.

Asma said of Zayd, in words that stop you, "He used to give life to the buried girls." She did not mean that he raised the dead. She meant something almost as astonishing. In that age, when a man received the news that his newborn was a girl, his face would darken and he would look for somewhere to hide his shame, and then, in the dark, families would carry their infant daughters out to pits dug in the ground and bury them alive. The Qur'an would one day make the horror of it eternal, naming the day when

when the baby girl buried alive is asked

QUR'AN 81:8

for what sin she was killed. And the Qur'an would lay bare the sickness in the hearts that did it:

*When one of them is given news of the birth of a baby girl,
his face darkens and he is filled with gloom.*

QUR'AN 16:58

Zayd, with no Book to tell him this was wrong, was disgusted by it. And he did not merely call it a betrayal of Abraham and leave it there. He went out. He would find a family carrying their daughter to be buried and say to the father, "Do not kill her. I will take her, and care for her and all her expenses." He took the girls into his own home, raised them, spent on them. And when a girl had grown, he would go back to her family and offer to return her, or,

if they wished, to see her married to a suitable man himself and act as her guardian. A man with no prophet, no community, no scripture, spent his own wealth rescuing infant girls from the dirt and raising them as his own.

Where does a heart like that come from? It is narrated of him that he never committed adultery and never drank wine, and that he warned against adultery, saying it brings poverty into a man's life. He was, in nearly every way, living the religion that had not yet been revealed. That was the sincerity of his search. He was not chasing a slogan. He was reaching for the whole of Abraham's way, and the whole of it reached back and shaped how he ate, how he prayed, how he treated the weakest and most discarded people in his city.

The journey that ended too soon

He traveled to find the truth. He went north to Sham, the lands of Syria, and to Mosul in Iraq, the same road another seeker named Salman al-Farisi would later walk. While other men of Makkah went north for trade, Zayd went to argue with scholars and press rabbis and priests for the answer to the questions that would not leave him alone. His wife dreaded these journeys; his uncle had barred him from home; and still he went, torn and searching.

In Sham he did what Salman would do. He asked to be taken to the most learned monk they had, and told him what he was looking for. And the monk told him the thing that turns the whole story. The one you are waiting for, he said, is about to come out from the very land you left. Go back to Makkah. The prophet is to be sent now, from there.

So Zayd turned for home, his heart racing, with no idea that the noble young man he had been calling "son of my brother," the

one he had warned away from the idols' meat, was the very prophet he was hurrying back to meet. He reached a place called Balqa, not far now, when highway robbers fell on him, stripped him of everything, and decided to kill him and cast his body aside. He was about eighty-five years old. A lifetime spent searching for the way of Abraham, and just when he was told the light was about to rise in the land where he had stood alone for it, he was struck down on the road home.

As he was dying, he made one last supplication. He did not ask to be saved. He said, "O Allah, if You have denied me this companionship with Your Prophet, then do not deny it to my son, Sa'id."

That prayer was answered. His son, Sa'id ibn Zayd, became one of the earliest to accept the Prophet ﷺ and one of the ten given the glad tidings of Paradise. The very companionship the father was denied on a roadside, the son was granted. The man who had spent his life saving other people's daughters had his own children carried by Allah into the very heart of the thing he had searched for and missed.

A nation all by himself

So what becomes of such a man? He died, by the reckoning in the story, about five years before the Prophet ﷺ even knew he would be a prophet. He never said the shahadah, never prayed a prayer he had been taught. Could his children even hope for him? Could they ask Allah's forgiveness for him, or had a life of monotheism and noble striving still ended in loss?

Sa'id and Umar, may Allah be pleased with them, came to the Prophet ﷺ carrying that fear. They did not dare ask whether Zayd was in the Fire; it would have been too much to bear. So

they asked only, "O Messenger of Allah, may we seek forgiveness for Zayd?" And the Prophet ﷺ said, "Seek forgiveness for him." Then he told them why. He said that on the Day of Judgment, when the prophets are raised, each with his nation gathered behind him, some with thousands and some with only a handful, Zayd would be raised as a nation entirely on his own, standing between the Prophet ﷺ and Jesus son of Mary, one man, an entire ummah by himself.

Consider what that echoes. Allah said of Ibrahim that he was a nation in himself, one man who carried the good of a whole people. And here is Zayd, who loved Ibrahim and gave his life to Ibrahim's way, standing as a nation in himself, fitting nowhere else because there was no community on earth he had ever belonged to.

It does not end there. A companion named Amr ibn Rabi'ah, who had known Zayd, came to the Prophet ﷺ in tears with a memory. Zayd had told him, "I am waiting for a prophet from the descendants of Ismail. He will be upon the way of Abraham," and had pointed to the Kaaba, "and he will pray toward this. If I live to see him, I will believe in him and support him. But I have a feeling I will not live long enough. If you see him, give him my salaam." So when the prophet from the line of Ismail came, Amr accepted Islam and delivered the greeting. The Prophet ﷺ returned it, asked Allah's mercy upon Zayd, and said, "By Allah, I saw Zayd in Paradise, trailing his garments." In another authentic report the Prophet ﷺ said that he entered Paradise and saw that Allah had given Zayd two levels of it, for him alone.

His friend Waraqah, hearing of his death, eulogized him with lines that carry the heart of his life: that he had been rightly guided and had won, that he had saved himself from the blazing Fire by

worshipping a Lord who has no equal and abandoning the worthless idols, and that the mercy of his Lord reaches a man even if he lies sixty layers beneath the earth.

What Zayd's life asks of our faith

It is easy to read a life like Zayd's as a marvel and leave it there, a strange and beautiful exception, a man with a gift for guidance that the rest of us were not given. That would be a mistake. The Prophet ﷺ drew the opposite lesson from him. He spoke of the natural disposition, the fitrah, of a soul that is at peace with its Lord, and how such a soul is drawn, on its own, toward the things that please Allah. Zayd's life is not a curiosity. It is proof of what an honest heart will find when it refuses to settle.

So the first thing his life asks is this: do not be complacent. Zayd would not accept the religion of his city simply because it was the religion of his city. Everyone around him worshipped the idols; he looked deeper, kept looking, and would not stop until he found something his heart could rest on. Most of us inherit our practice the way the people of Makkah inherited theirs, by habit, by surroundings, by the path of least resistance. Zayd asks whether your faith is something you have actually sought, or only something you happened to be handed. Seek it. Read, ask, reflect, and pray to be guided, the way he prayed, "O Allah, if only I knew the way most beloved to You, I would worship You by it."

The second thing is sincerity, ikhlas, in its purest and loneliest form. Zayd had no audience that approved of him, no community that rewarded him, no scripture that confirmed him, and no certainty that he was even right about the details. He prostrated anyway. He rescued the buried girls anyway. He stood at the Kaaba and testified anyway. He did it all for Allah alone, because

there was no one else to do it for. Ask yourself how much of your own worship survives when no one is watching and no one approves. Zayd's whole life was worship with no one watching. That is the kind Allah saw, and rewarded with two levels of Paradise.

The third thing is that his faith was never only in his heart; it reached his hands. The way of Abraham, the Prophet ﷺ reminds us through this story, was never merely to believe in one God. It was to honour that God with everything: to refuse what is forbidden, to keep clear of corruption, and to defend the weakest people from cruelty. Zayd believed in one God, and the same faith drove him out into the night to pull infant girls back from the grave. Real iman does this. It does not sit still. If your belief in Allah is genuine, it will show up in how you treat the people the world discards, the orphan, the poor, the one no one else will protect. Find one such person this week, and be to them what Zayd was to those girls.

And the last thing his life asks is the deepest. Zayd died on a roadside, robbed and alone, five years before the light he had spent his whole life seeking ever rose, and from the outside it looked like a wasted life, a man who searched and searched and died just short. But Allah saw the search itself. Allah answered the dying man's prayer for his son. Allah raised the lonely seeker as a nation of his own, between His Messenger ﷺ and the son of Mary. Nothing Zayd did for Allah was lost, not one prostration, not one rescued child, not one rebuke at the Kaaba, even though he never lived to see the religion arrive. This is the promise that should steady you when your own efforts seem to come to nothing: Allah does not measure your life by whether you lived to see the result. He measures it by whether you turned to Him with a sincere heart. Turn to Him, then, the way Zayd did, with

whatever you have and whatever you know, and trust that He who reaches a man's mercy through sixty layers of earth will not let a sincere heart go to waste.

May Allah be pleased with Zayd ibn Amr ibn Nufayl, the nation of one, and grant us a measure of the sincerity that made him beloved before the message even came, and gather us with him and with His Messenger ﷺ on the Day the nations are raised.

This chapter follows the account of Zayd ibn Amr ibn Nufayl (RA) in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (6:162, 81:8, 16:58). Where the histories carry more than one narration, the most widely reported has been followed.

The Firsts

Forerunners, Trendsetters, Strangers, Revivers, and the Distinguished

There is a way to read history that leaves a person untouched. You hear of the great ones who came before, you admire them for an hour, and then you close the book and go back to a life that is in no way changed by what you read. Dr. Omar Suleiman opens this entire series by refusing that way of reading. If we only study history to admire people, he says, then we will never be part of making history ourselves. And when the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ speaks of certain distinguished human beings who will stand apart on the Day of Judgment, and we do not aspire to be among them, then we have not really understood the words he left for us.

So before we meet any single companion, we begin with a question that hangs over all of them: what does it mean to be first? Not first in fame or fortune, but first in the only race that matters. The Qur'an and the Sunnah lay out several kinds of firsts, several doors through which an ordinary person can walk into something extraordinary. This chapter is about five of them: the forerunners, the trendsetters, the strangers, the revivers, and the distinguished. They are not five different elites. They are five faces of one heart, the heart that will not wait, will not blend in, and will not let what is good slip quietly out of the world.

The forerunners, who do not wait

The first group are the **sabiqun**, the forerunners. These are people who rush toward good the moment they hear of it or see it. They do not wait for anyone to lead them. They do not drag their feet, do not glance around to see who is going first, do not measure the room before they move. The instant the good appears, they are already moving toward it.

Allah describes them as people locked in competition, racing one another and racing themselves, always pushing toward a higher level. The Prophet ﷺ said the same in plain words: hasten to do good deeds. The scholars call these the people of high ambition, those who refuse to let their surroundings set the pace for them. They do not wait for an environment to drag them upward, and they do not wait for someone else to outdo them. They are self-driven, because they know that this rushing is pleasing to Allah, and so they hurry to be among the first to please their Lord.

The Qur'an names them with a strange and beautiful repetition. Allah does not call them simply the forerunners. He says it twice:

And those in front--ahead indeed! For these will be the ones brought nearest to God

QUR'AN 56:10-11

Why repeat the word? Dr. Omar Suleiman draws out what the scholars saw in it. On the Day of Judgment, humanity is sorted into the people of the right hand and the people of the left, and the vast majority fall into those two groups. But there is a third, smaller group who belong to neither side. They are brought directly near, under the shade of Allah's throne on a day when there is no other shade. One reading of the doubled word is this: they rushed to Allah in this world, so they will be rushed to Allah in the next. Picture the dead rising from their graves, each one

driven by an angel to the place prepared for them. No one wakes that morning and opens a map. You are taken. And these, may Allah make us among them, are escorted to their Lord at once, into His protection, because that is exactly how they lived. In this life they rushed to Allah. In the next, they are rushed to Him.

There is a second, intensely practical reading, and it is the one that should reach into our ordinary days. The forerunners are defined by their response time. Allah honored the earliest believers in Makkah, those who embraced the faith before the conquest of the city, who stood with the Prophet ﷺ under threat, who were driven from their homes and spent everything for the cause of Allah. He gave them a rank that those who came later, in easier times, would never share, while still promising every believer a reward. And Dr. Omar Suleiman is honest with us here: you may say you could never have been among those first believers in Makkah. True. But the meaning reaches you anyway. When good calls, in whatever form, a person urging you, an inner pull toward the right thing, a verse you hear, what is your wait time? Do you run, or do you hesitate?

That hesitation is not a small thing. The Qur'an, in the same breath where it warns against corrupting the soul, also condemns the holding back, the cold feet, the "tomorrow" that never comes. Dr. Omar Suleiman paints the scene unforgettably: there were people in Makkah who heard the Prophet ﷺ and went to bed having decided that tomorrow they would go and accept the faith, and they woke in the morning and said, never mind. Because of that single delay, they never became companions. They are forgotten. And he sets beside them the moment Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) read the opening of Surah Taha in his sister's house and recognized it as revelation. Had he said, let me go home and think for a few days,

he might have woken the next morning and gone back to his old intent to harm the Prophet ﷺ. Instead he said, take me to the Messenger, now. The race is not lost only by those who quit. It is lost by those who sit down on the side of the road and tell themselves it is just for ten minutes.

The trendsetters, who light the first hand

The second group are the **trendsetters**, and to meet them we go to a scene narrated by Jabir ibn Abdullah (may Allah be pleased with him). A group of poor desert Arabs came before the Prophet ﷺ and the companions. They were barely clothed, with only scraps of wool to cover themselves, no food, clearly starving, not from any prominent tribe, the kind of people no one feels an automatic pull to defend. The Prophet ﷺ looked at them and told the companions to hurry and give in charity. This was not the obligatory zakah; it was a call to generosity, and he expected a quick answer.

But Jabir says the Prophet ﷺ saw the hesitation and the slow pace of the people, and his face changed; the disappointment showed on it. Then one man from the Ansar came forward with a pouch heavy with silver and laid it before the Prophet ﷺ. And something broke open. The companions saw it, and they went home and came back with their coins and their jewelry, until the sadness on his face turned to joy. Anyone who has ever stood before a crowd waiting for the first hand to rise knows exactly what happened in that moment. The first hand makes the second possible.

That man was more than a forerunner. He set the trend. The others did what he did, moved by his doing. And the Prophet ﷺ captured the moment in words that should make every one of us reconsider the weight of a single good act. He said that whoever

introduces a good practice in Islam, a practice already part of the faith that he revives or initiates among the people, and it is then followed by others, will have a reward like the reward of everyone who follows it, without their reward being diminished in the slightest. The trendsetter and the one who acted on it share the reward, and the follower loses nothing.

Dr. Omar Suleiman draws out how staggering this is. The "after that" in the Prophet's words can mean ten seconds later, or ten years later, or a thousand years later. So when someone today cleans the masjid and the memory of the woman who used to clean it is honored, she receives reward in her grave. When someone removes something harmful from the road, the unnamed man of that hadith is rewarded. When someone gives water to a thirsty animal, the one who first did so is remembered and rewarded, centuries on. He mentioned other forms of this same gift from the mouth of the Prophet ﷺ: that whoever guides another to a good deed has a reward like its doer, and whoever calls people to guidance receives a reward equal to all who follow it. You learn something good and teach it, you say it aloud, and a person acts on it, and the trail of reward runs back to you for as long as it lasts. The trendsetter does not need a stage. He only needs to be the first hand in the room.

The strangers, who will not follow the crowd

The third group are the **ghuraba**, the strangers, and here the direction of motion reverses. The forerunner rushes toward good and the trendsetter pulls others along with him. The stranger does something quieter and, in its own way, harder: he refuses to be carried by a current that is going the wrong way.

The Prophet ﷺ said that Islam began as something strange and will return to being something strange, and then he gave the glad

tidings: so blessed are the strangers. Dr. Omar Suleiman explains that the strangers are those who hold to unpopular truths and who rectify themselves when the people around them are sinking into corruption. They do not follow the trend of corruption simply because it is the trend. Set this in line with the others and a clear pattern appears. The forerunners rush to good and away from evil. The trendsetters set good and others follow. And the strangers hold their ground against negative trends that have already become dominant, and for that holding they are rewarded.

The pressure to follow the crowd is real, and the Prophet ﷺ armed his companions against it. He took Abdullah ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) by the shoulder and said, be in this world as though you were a stranger or a traveler passing through. And Ibn Umar would add his own counsel: if you reach the evening, do not expect to see the morning; if you reach the morning, do not expect to see the evening. There is urgency in being a stranger, because people most often follow popular corruption out of pressure, to fit in. But the one who keeps the next life before his eyes is not so easily frightened or shamed into trading away what would raise him with Allah for the sake of what is merely common around him now.

This is where the Qur'an cuts against one of our deepest instincts, the instinct that the majority must be right. It is not always so. Dr. Omar Suleiman points to Allah's warning that if you were to obey most of the people on the earth, they would lead you away from His path, following nothing but their own guesses. The majority of a passing trend is no proof of truth. The stranger knows this, and so he stands a little apart, not out of arrogance, but because he has measured his life against eternity and found the crowd a poor judge of it.

The revivers, who bring the lost back to life

The fourth group are the **mujaddidun**, the revivers, and they are built directly on the work of the strangers. The Prophet ﷺ said that at the head of every century, Allah sends to this ummah one who revives for it its religion, who brings back to life what has been lost of it. To revive is to notice what has gone missing from the way of the Prophet ﷺ among the people, and to restore it, and in restoring it to bring the religion itself back to life in that place or among those people.

Dr. Omar Suleiman widens the idea past the famous reading where each century is assigned a single named figure. The Arabic, he notes, does not force the word to a single person; there may be many revivers in one age, each restoring a different lost element of the faith in a different land. He offers Umar ibn Abdul Aziz (may Allah be pleased with him) as the one revival nearly everyone agrees upon: a man who brought back the justice his great forefather Umar ibn al-Khattab had established, restoring to the ummah a sense of fairness that had slipped away, and in doing so reviving something that had grown faint.

But the part of this that belongs to us is the part he calls revival in the small sense. You do not have to be the reformer of a century to be a reviver. If you find a sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ that has gone missing in your own corner of life, something conceptual or something as simple and concrete as a forgotten practice, and you take it upon yourself to bring it back to life, you have entered the work of the revivers. The point is the initiative: to look at what has quietly disappeared of the good your Prophet ﷺ taught, and to decide that in your context, in your home, in your circle, it will live again because of you.

The distinguished, who are measured by quality

The fifth and final group are the **muhsinun**, the distinguished, and they are different from all who came before. They are not first to do something, nor are they reviving what was lost. They simply do good so well, with such excellence, that they are set apart by it. They go the extra mile when no one requires it. And here Dr. Omar Suleiman ties the strangers and the distinguished together with a thread from Ibn al-Qayyim. When a person embraces Islam, he becomes a stranger in the broad world of humanity. When a person becomes truly conscious of Allah, leaving off the sins that have become normal even among Muslims, he becomes a stranger among the Muslims themselves, because turning away from what everyone tolerates can draw more pressure than anything an outsider could level at you. And the distinguished are strangers even among the people of piety, because they reach for good that even the conscious do not reach for.

There is a warning folded into this, and it is one we badly need. You cannot be one of the distinguished without first being one of the God-conscious. Some people excel in one place and let it cover for them everywhere else. Dr. Omar Suleiman recalls the woman the companions described to the Prophet ﷺ: she prayed through the night, she fasted extra days, her worship was abundant, but her tongue wounded her neighbors. She had excellence in one direction and no restraint in another, and that abandons the foundation. Excellence in worship does not buy permission to be careless with people. The same drive that pulls a person away from what has become normal sin is the drive that makes him long for the good that everyone else has neglected. It is one motion, and it begins with reverence for Allah.

And the distinguished are not measured the way we instinctively measure. Their distinction has nothing to do with quantity and

everything to do with quality. Dr. Omar Suleiman grounds this in the words of Allah about the purpose of life itself:

who created death and life to test you [people] and reveal which of you does best--He is the Mighty, the Forgiving;

QUR'AN 67:2

The test is not who does the most. It is who does the best. He returns to Umar ibn Abdul Aziz, who, it is reported, prayed only two units of prayer each night, never more. His wife said those two were nothing like all the night prayers of the rest of them put together: two units that were, as she described them, out of this world. That is the mark of the distinguished. Not the count, but the quality, and beneath the quality, the longing for Allah that made them strangers to the world's indifference.

What the Firsts ask of our faith

It would be easy to read about five categories of the elect and quietly place yourself outside all of them, to admire the forerunners and the revivers as you would admire a mountain, beautiful and distant, with nothing to ask of you. That would be the very mistake Dr. Omar Suleiman warned against in his first breath. None of these five is a closed circle. Each one is a door, and the striking thing is how ordinary the entrance is.

To be a forerunner is not to have lived in Makkah in the first years. It is to shorten the distance between hearing of a good and doing it. The whole danger is the gap, the "tomorrow," the ten minutes on the side of the road. So make your faith a faith of quick response. When you feel the pull toward prayer, toward charity, toward an apology you owe, toward a kindness no one is asking of you, move before the moment cools. Trust that Allah,

who placed the prompting in your heart, will honor the one who answers it at once.

To be a trendsetter is to remember that you are never the only one in the room. The man with the pouch of silver did not give more than the others would eventually give; he gave first, and his first hand unlocked every hand behind it. Your good deed is rarely just yours. Someone is watching, a child, a sibling, a coworker, a stranger, and the practice you revive may run on long after you are in your grave, carrying reward back to you for as long as it lives. So do the good thing visibly enough that it can be followed, not for your name, but so that it spreads, the willingness to be the first hand for the sake of the hands you will never see.

To be a stranger is to make peace with standing slightly apart. There will be currents around you that everyone seems to be riding, and some lead away from Allah. The stranger is not rude, not arrogant, not contemptuous of people; he has simply weighed the crowd against eternity and refused to let the majority decide his soul. That refusal will cost you a measure of belonging. Pay it. The Prophet ﷺ called the strangers blessed, and told you to live as a traveler passing through, holding nothing here so tightly that you would sell your hereafter to keep it.

To be a reviver is to look at what has gone quiet of your Prophet's way and to bring it back where you stand. Not the reform of an age, just one neglected good restored in your home, your masjid, your own habits, so that something he ﷺ loved is alive again because you decided it would be. And to be one of the distinguished is to care about quality over quantity, to offer the two units of prayer you do pray with a heart fully present, and to refuse to let excellence in one corner excuse carelessness in

another. It begins, always, with reverence for Allah and the longing that reverence breeds.

Here is the heart of all five, the thing that turns them from a lecture into a life. Every one of these doors opens inward, toward Allah, not outward toward people. The forerunner rushes for Him. The trendsetter sets the trend for His sake. The stranger stands apart for Him. The reviver restores for Him. The distinguished excel for Him. The reward of each is held in His hand, seen by Him, and kept by Him when the world has forgotten the deed entirely. So you do not need a special century or a famous name to be among the firsts. You need a heart that will not wait, will not blend in, will not let the good die, and will not measure itself by the crowd. Choose one door today. Answer one prompting without delay. Be the first hand once. Hold to one truth the crowd has dropped. Revive one forgotten good. Do one small thing with excellence, for Allah alone, where no one will ever know. May Allah be pleased with the firsts who have gone before us, and make us, in our own ordinary days, among those who race toward Him.

This chapter follows the framing of the five categories of "the firsts" in Dr. Omar Suleiman's series The Firsts (Yaqeen Institute). Qur'an translations are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (56:10-11, 67:2). The reflection draws on the meanings developed in the lecture and does not constitute a scholarly ruling.