

Extended commentaries on the texts

Musharraf Hussain on Al-Fatihah

The opening surat of The Majestic Quran summarises the major themes and topics of the Qur'an:

- shaping a world view through the belief system
- faith in Allah, His messengers and the Hereafter
- the Angels
- Predestination and the Day of Resurrection
- challenging idolatry and materialism
- practising the Five Pillars
- emphasis on applying the laws: halal and haram
- an invitation to embrace spiritual ideals: mindfulness and alertness, reliance on Allah
- the promotion of moral teachings
- the condemnation of moral vices
- social obligations
- the life and beautiful character of the Messenger
- the history of human disobedience
- Satan the arch enemy, how he misleads and his snares and traps
- human diversity and pluralism
- the awe-inspiring nature [of Allah]
- vivid descriptions of Heaven and Hell.

This is the essence of the Qur'an.

It is read dozens of times daily in the prayers and is a plea, a prayer that the devout servant makes to the Caring Lord. The rest of the Qur'an is a response to this, and the blessed Messenger praised its virtue: "by Him in whose hand is my life, nothing like this was ever revealed in the Torah or the Psalms or the Gospel" (Ahmed). A concise prayer that is life transforming, no wonder the Messenger described it as: *al-fatihah*, the door to the treasury of wisdom; Umm al-Qur'an, the fountain of Qur'anic wisdom; *al-shifa*, the healing for moral, spiritual and social diseases.

The Majestic Quran: a plain English translation, by Musharraf Hussain (p. 1) Second edition (2019), published by Invitation Publishing. Used by permission.

Gerald Hawthorne on Philippians 2

The Philippians have been acting in a spirit of ambition, thinking themselves better than others, believing that they were above serving their fellows, studying how they might promote themselves and get ahead without giving adequate attention to the welfare of their neighbour. Christ ... challenges every one of these false values of the Philippians. He becomes, therefore, for Paul the ultimate model for moral action.

The hymn begins by describing Christ before the incarnation – he possessed the nature of God and was equal with God. But contrary to what one might expect, the true nature of God is not to grasp or get or selfishly to hold onto things for personal advantage, but to give them up for the enrichment of all. This is demonstrated by Christ, who, because he shared the nature of God, did not hold firm to the high position that was his by right, but rather stepped down from it. That is to say, he deliberately placed himself in the humblest of positions: he who was in the form of God became a man, a fully human being, a slave even, so that he might serve others. In the self-humbling act of the incarnation God became man and thus set himself wholly to seek the advantage and promote the welfare of his fellows. It was never the intent of Christ to fight for his own honour and right and credit, but through self-surrender, self-renunciation and self-sacrifice to strive for the honour, right and credit of others. To obey, as a slave must, was his delight. So radical was obedience that he did not withdraw it even when he was faced with death – the most cruel of all deaths, death by crucifixion. He must somehow have known, though, that his death was not his alone, but once again an act that worked for the good of others.

As a consequence God exalted him. This in the divine economy of things, by giving you receive, by serving you are served, by losing your life you find it, by dying you live, by humbling yourself you are exalted. The one follows the other as night follows day, but always in this order – self-sacrifice first, before the self is exalted by God.

Taken from *Philippians, Volume 43* by Ralph P Martin & Gerald F Hawthorne (p. 95). Copyright © 2004 by Thomas Nelson Inc. Used by permission of Thomas Nelson. www.thomasnelson.com

How does Al-Fatihah connect with all the themes laid out by Musharraf Hussain? Put a copy of the text in the centre of a page and label it with as many points from Hussain's commentary as you can.

Draw three columns on a page. In column 1, list the behaviours of the Philippian Christians. In column 2, list the actions of Jesus, as set out in Paul's letter. In column 3, list the kinds of behaviour Paul expects of Christians, inspired by Jesus' example.