

SIFAH LECTURE SERIES

Alhamdulillah at Its Hardest: Becoming the People of Praise

A practical lecture — knowledge you can act on

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SIFAH

SCHOOL OF ISLAMIC
FOUNDATIONS &
ADVOCACY FOR HUMANITY

Alhamdulillah at Its Hardest: Becoming the People of Praise

The easy Alhamdulillah is on every tongue. The hard one builds a house in Paradise. Here is how to become the kind of believer who praises Allah in every state.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The word we say a thousand times and rarely reach

My dear brother, my dear sister, let me begin with a word you have said more times than you can count. It is a word that fills your day, that leaves your lips almost without thought, and yet it hides a depth that most of us never touch. That word is *al-ḥamdu lillāh* — all praise belongs to Allah. I do not want to speak to you today about the easy Alhamdulillah. You know the one I mean. It is the Alhamdulillah at the graduation, at the wedding, at the birth of a child, when the exam results come back with a pass, when the offer letter finally arrives. Even a person barely holding on to his religion says Alhamdulillah at moments like these, because the blessing is right in front of his eyes and his heart is already glad.

No, I want to speak to you about the Alhamdulillah that is **hard** to say. The Alhamdulillah that catches in the throat. The Alhamdulillah when it hurts. Not the praise of the moment of triumph, but the praise of the moment of trauma. Not the thanks you give when an obvious gift arrives, but the thanks you give when Allah tests you and a gift is *taken away*. Let me ask you honestly: have you ever had to say Alhamdulillah when your whole body was fighting against the word? When your eyes were full and your chest was tight and every instinct in you wanted to complain instead? That is the Alhamdulillah I want to build with you today. Because that is the one that changes a person forever.

Consider the difference for a moment. It is one thing to praise Allah while you carry your newborn child for the very first time, feeling that tiny weight against your chest. It is another thing entirely to praise Him when He tests you and you are lowering that same child into the earth. And yet — hold on to this — the Prophet ﷺ taught us that for the one who praises Allah in *that* loss, in that unbearable moment, Allah commands the angels to build a house in Paradise, and they name it *Bayt al-Ḥamd*, the House of Praise. Think of what that means. From the deepest ache a human being can feel, a mansion rises in the Garden, built brick by brick from a single sincere Alhamdulillah.

إِذَا مَاتَ وَلَدُ الْعَبْدِ قَالَ اللَّهُ لِمَلَائِكَتِهِ قَبِضْتُمْ وَلَدَ
عَبْدِي فَيَقُولُونَ نَعَمْ فَيَقُولُ قَبِضْتُمْ ثَمَرَةَ فُؤَادِهِ فَيَقُولُونَ
نَعَمْ فَيَقُولُ مَاذَا قَالَ عَبْدِي فَيَقُولُونَ حَمْدَكَ وَاسْتَرجِعْ
فَيَقُولُ اللَّهُ ابْنُوا لِعَبْدِي بَيْتًا فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَسَمُّوهُ بَيْتَ الْحَمْدِ

*When a servant's child dies, Allah says to His angels: 'You have taken the child of My servant?' They say: 'Yes.' He says: 'You have taken the fruit of his heart?' They say: 'Yes.' He says: 'What did My servant say?' They say: 'He praised You and said **indeed we belong to Allah and to Him we return.**' So Allah says: 'Build for My servant a house in Paradise, and name it the House of Praise.'*

Source: Jami at-Tirmidhi: 1021 · **Authenticity:** Hasan

It is so much easier to say Alhamdulillah at the moment of receiving than at the moment of losing. There is a great difference between the two, and a far, far greater reward. So let us begin our journey there — with the two phrases that live most often on a believer's tongue and yet become the hardest words in his entire vocabulary at the hardest moments of his life.

THE TWO HARDEST EASY WORDS

The best dhikr and the best du'a

The Prophet ﷺ named for us the best remembrance and the best supplication, and I want you to notice how ordinary they seem — and then how impossible they can become.

أَفْضَلُ الذِّكْرِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ، وَأَفْضَلُ الدُّعَاءِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ

*The best remembrance is: **there is no god but Allah**; and the best supplication is: **all praise belongs to Allah**.*

Source: Jami at-Tirmidhi: 3383 · **Authenticity:** Hasan

Look carefully at this pairing, because it is teaching us something profound about ourselves. *Lā ilāha illā Allāh* is the most frequent dhikr a believer ever makes. You say it in your prayer, in your dhikr, in the adhān that reaches your ears five times a day. It should be the easiest phrase in the world for your tongue. And yet there will come one moment when it becomes harder to say than any other word you have ever spoken — the moment you leave this world. And the best supplication, Alhamdulillah, is the same. Light on the tongue, but heavy on the heart precisely when you need it most.

Allah promised something beautiful about that final, terrifying moment. He said He gives firmness to the ones who believe, with a firm word, in this life and in the Hereafter.

يُثَبِّتُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِالْقَوْلِ الثَّابِتِ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا
وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ وَيُضِلُّ اللَّهُ الظَّالِمِينَ وَيَفْعَلُ اللَّهُ مَا يَشَاءُ

*Allah keeps firm those who believe with the firm word in the life of this world and in the Hereafter.
And Allah leaves the wrongdoers astray, and **Allah does what He wills**.*

Surah Ibrahim (14:27)

How often have we seen it, my brothers and sisters. A tongue that will not obey. A heart that has shut. The eyes closing before a person can even utter *lā ilāha illā Allāh*. This is why the Prophet ﷺ commanded us to gently prompt our dying loved ones with it, to place the word on their lips when they can no longer reach for it themselves.

لَقِّنُوا مَوْتَكُمْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ

*Prompt your dying ones to say: **there is no god but Allah.***

Source: Sahih Muslim: 916 · **Authenticity:** Sahih

And here is the lesson, the same for both phrases, and I need you to feel the weight of it. The best word is meant to be said at the hardest moment — and you cannot summon at the end of your life a word that was a stranger to you throughout it. You cannot expect a phrase to appear on your tongue in the hour of death if you never trained your heart to love it in the hours of ease. The one who wore out his tongue on *lā ilāha illā Allāh* in his days of strength will find it waiting for him in his hour of weakness. And the one who trained himself on Alhamdulillah over the small blessings will find it ready when the great trial comes crashing down. The hard word at the end is only earned by the easy word at the beginning.

A NEW IDENTITY

The people whose very condition is praise

The Prophet ﷺ described a kind of believer that I want you to fall in love with today. Not merely a person who *happens* to praise when things go well. That is easy, that is common, that requires no faith at all. No — he described a person whose very identity has become praise, in good times and in bad alike. They are not praising by circumstance. Praise is no longer something they do; it has become their **condition**, their nature, who they are. Whatever strikes them, from wherever it comes, the answer is the same: Alhamdulillah.

And the most complete example of this human being who ever lived was our beloved Messenger ﷺ himself. Listen to how his own household described his instinct, his automatic response to whatever life placed before him.

كَانَ النَّبِيُّ ﷺ إِذَا أَتَاهُ الْأَمْرُ يُسِرُّهُ قَالَ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي
بِنِعْمَتِهِ تَمُّ الصَّالِحَاتُ، وَإِذَا أَتَاهُ الْأَمْرُ يَكْرَهُهُ قَالَ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ عَلَى كُلِّ حَالٍ

*When something that pleased him came to the Prophet ﷺ, he would say: **all praise belongs to Allah by whose favour good things are completed.** And when something he disliked came to him, he would say: **all praise belongs to Allah in every state.***

Source: Sunan Ibn Majah: 3803 · **Authenticity:** Hasan

Reflect on this with me. Both the thing that pleased him and the thing that grieved him drove him to the same destination: praise. Imagine you had walked into the masjid and found him in sajdah, his forehead on the ground, his shoulders shaking with emotion. You would not have been able to tell whether something wonderful had just happened to him or something devastating — because both drove him to the same prostration, the same Alhamdulillah, the same tears. Joy and sorrow, in his heart, both flowed into the same ocean of gratitude.

And notice what he did *not* do. He did not feel sorry for himself. When you and I read his Sirah, we weep — we weep at the day he buried his sons, at the day his beloved Khadijah passed, at the day the people of Ṭā'if drove him out with stones until the blood filled his sandals. We weep for him. And yet *he himself* did not sink into self-pity. On that very day at Ṭā'if, when the angel offered to crush the town between the mountains, his response was not bitterness but mercy and hope. He praised. He turned to Allah with the most beautiful du'a of complaint that ends in surrender and trust. That is the example set before us: not to drown in sorrow for ourselves, but to lift our heads and say Alhamdulillah for everything Allah has still given us to be grateful for, even inside the very wound of our loss.

Why the hard Alhamdulillah is the greater one

Now let me show you why the harder Alhamdulillah is worth so much more than the easy one, because once you understand this, you will start to hunger for the reward hidden inside your trials. When Allah gives you an obvious blessing and you say Alhamdulillah, what are you doing? You are thanking Him for a visible gift. You are recognising His obvious generosity, His *karam* that you can see with your eyes and hold in your hands. That is real, and it is beautiful, and it is required of you. But notice: it asks very little of your faith, because the reason to be grateful is right there in front of you.

But when Allah *tests* you, and through the tears you still manage to say *Alhamdulillah ‘alā kulli ḥāl* — all praise belongs to Allah in every state — something completely different is happening inside you. You are now praising Him for a blessing you **cannot see**, a mercy hidden behind the trial, a wisdom your eyes cannot yet reach. You are praising Him not from a place of visible generosity but from a place of pure *tawakkul*, of trust in His unseen plan. You have connected yourself to an entirely different attribute of your Lord: not merely His generosity, but His perfect wisdom and His total knowledge of what is good for you when you have no idea yourself.

So let me ask you: which of the two is harder to recognise as a blessing? Obviously the second. The gift you can see almost thanks itself. The gift hidden inside the loss must be praised on faith alone. And here is the secret of your whole spiritual life — the first is meant to **train you** for the second. Every time you say Alhamdulillah over an easy blessing, you are rehearsing. You are building the muscle. Just as your *lā ilāha illā Allāh* in the days of strength is training for the *lā ilāha illā Allāh* of your final breath, your Alhamdulillah over your morning coffee is training for the Alhamdulillah over the loss that will one day test the very foundations of your heart.

And this is precisely why every great phrase a believer reaches for in calamity is, at its very root, a form of praise. *Ḥasbunā Allāhu wa ni‘ma al-wakīl* — Allah is sufficient for us and He is the best of guardians. *Innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rāji‘ūn* — indeed we belong to Allah and to Him we return. Look inside each of these phrases and you will find the same thing: an admission of your own helplessness and a declaration of Allah's knowledge, His power, and His authority over your affairs. And that is what ḥamd *is*. Allah Himself commanded this response, and He attached to it a glad tiding so precious that it silences every complaint.

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ
الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ * الَّذِينَ
إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

*And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth, lives, and fruits; but give good tidings to the patient, who, when disaster strikes them, say: **indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return.***

Surah Al-Baqarah (2:155-156)

WHERE THE TRAINING HAPPENS

The praise over your bread and your clothes

Now I do not want you to walk away thinking that praise is reserved only for the great crises of life, saved up for the funerals and the hospital rooms. If that were true, you would have almost no chance to practise. So look at how the Prophet ﷺ tied the mercy of Allah to the very smallest blessings — the food you eat and the clothes you wear, the ordinary things you receive every single day and rarely pause over even for a second.

مَنْ أَكَلَ طَعَامًا فَقَالَ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَطْعَمَنِي هَذَا
وَرَزَقَنِيهِ مِنْ غَيْرِ حَوْلٍ مِنِّي وَلَا قُوَّةٍ غُفِرَ لَهُ مَا تَقَدَّمَ
مِنْ ذَنْبِهِ

*Whoever eats food and says: **all praise belongs to Allah who fed me this and provided it for me without any might or power of my own**, will be forgiven his past sins.*

Source: Jami at-Tirmidhi: 3458 · **Authenticity:** Hasan

Stop and taste those words the Prophet ﷺ placed in our mouths: *without any might or power of my own*. Do you feel what that is doing? The praise here is not only thanks for the meal on the plate. It is a confession, an admission that the food itself, and the health to earn it, and the job that paid for it, and the strength in the arm that lifts the spoon, and the very hand at the end of that arm — all of it is from Allah, and none of it from you. You did not create the wheat. You did not cause the rain to fall on it. You did not command your own heart to keep beating while you ate. Every link in the chain is His.

And he taught us the same for clothing — that when you put on a new garment and praise the One who clothed you and covered you, your sins are wiped away. Ask yourself, honestly: how many mornings have you pulled on your clothes, walked out into the world, and never once thanked the One who gave you something to cover your body with, when so many in this world shiver with nothing? How many meals have you finished without a single word of gratitude to the Provider? My dear brother, my dear sister, this is your training ground. This is where you build the tongue and the heart that will one day, in the hardest hour, go automatically to the place they have always gone. The believer who trains himself to praise over the bread and the garment is the believer who will praise over the grave. Because in the moment of shock, you do not invent a response — you reach for your habit.

How heavy this light word truly is

Do not let the lightness of this word on your tongue fool you about its weight in the sight of Allah. We say it so carelessly, we let it slip out between distracted breaths, and all the while it is one of the heaviest things you can place on the scale of your deeds on the Day of Judgement. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ told us this in a hadith that should make us hoard this word like treasure.

الطُّهُورُ شَطْرُ الْإِيمَانِ، وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ تَمْلَأُ الْمِيزَانَ، وَسُبْحَانَ
اللَّهِ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ تَمْلَأْنَ مَا بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ

Purification is half of faith. And 'all praise belongs to Allah' fills the scale, and 'glory be to Allah' and 'all praise belongs to Allah' together fill what is between the heaven and the earth.

Source: Sahih Muslim: 223 · **Authenticity:** Sahih

Imagine that. A word so short you barely notice yourself saying it, and yet it alone can tip the balance of your entire eternity. And it is not only heavy — it is among the most *beloved* speech to Allah of all the words a human being can utter. The Prophet ﷺ told us that Allah chose, from the whole ocean of human language, four words dearest to Him.

أَحَبُّ الْكَلَامِ إِلَى اللَّهِ أَرْبَعُ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ وَلَا
إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ لَا يَضُرُّكَ بِأَيِّنَ بَدَأْتَ

The most beloved speech to Allah is four: glory be to Allah, all praise belongs to Allah, there is no god but Allah, and Allah is the greatest. It does not harm you with which of them you begin.

Source: Sahih Muslim: 2137 · **Authenticity:** Sahih

And here is my favourite image of all. The angels of Allah *compete* to carry your praise up to Him. A man once prayed behind the Prophet ﷺ, and as he rose from rukū‘ he said, *Rabbanā wa laka-l-ḥamd, ḥamdan kathīran ṭayyiban mubārakan fih* — our Lord, to You belongs all praise, abundant, pure, and blessed in it. When the prayer ended, the Prophet ﷺ asked who had spoken those words, and then he said something that should change how you say your dhikr forever.

لَقَدْ رَأَيْتُ بِضْعَةَ وَثَلَاثِينَ مَلَكًا يَبْتَدِرُونَهَا أَيَّامَ يَكْتُبُهَا
أَوَّلُ

I saw some thirty-odd angels hastening to be the one who would record it first.

Source: Sahih al-Bukhari: 799 · **Authenticity:** Sahih

Reflect on that scene, my brother, my sister. Words that we let fall so carelessly from our lips set the noble angels of Allah racing one another, jostling to be the first to write them down. And why does ḥamd carry all this weight? The scholars explained something beautiful. The word *ḥamd* gathers two things into a single word: praise *and* gratitude at once. When you say Alhamdulillah, you are not merely thanking Allah, and you are not merely praising Him — you are doing both in one breath. And it is no accident

that the very first words of the Book of Allah, after the basmalah, are His own praise of Himself: *al-hamdu lillāhi rabbi-l-‘ālamīn*. The first to praise Allah in the entire Qur'an is Allah Himself, teaching you the very first thing your tongue should learn to say.

THE WORLD YOU LIVE IN

Praise in an age of complaint

Now let me bring this all the way home, into the world you and I actually live in, because our age makes this harder than it has ever been. We live in a culture of complaint. Let me be honest with you about the device in your pocket right now. The platforms we scroll through do not reward the grateful; they reward the loudest grievance. They train us, hour by hour, to broadcast every annoyance, to perform our dissatisfaction for an audience, to scan the world constantly for what is wrong instead of what is good. Someone messages you, 'How are you?' — and notice where your thumb goes first. It reaches instinctively for a complaint. The traffic, the weather, the boss, the aches, the endless list of what is missing.

And here is the danger, and I want you to sit with it. What on earth makes a person think that if he curses and complains and grumbles through the whole of his easy, comfortable life, he will suddenly be able to summon the most important praise of his entire existence under the crushing, world-ending weight of a real calamity? You do not gather that up in the last moment. It does not appear out of nowhere. Praise in the storm is only ever a place you have already visited a thousand times in the sunshine. If the tongue is a stranger to Alhamdulillah on the good days, it will be mute on the day the ground opens beneath you.

So the believer trains differently, deliberately, against the current of the whole age. When someone asks how you are, you answer 'Alhamdulillah' and you *mean* it. You resist the powerful pull to perform your misery for an audience. You thank Allah for the roof over your head, the meal in front of you, the breath in your lungs, the eyes reading these very words right now — *before* you list the things you lack. And if Allah has given you children, you raise them upon gratitude rather than entitlement. You teach them to see the hand of Allah behind every gift, so they grow into people of praise and not people of grievance — because a child raised to complain will complain to Allah, and a child raised to thank will thank Him even in the dark.

So ask yourself, honestly, before you close this lecture: when something good reaches me, do I trace it back to Allah, or do I quietly treat it as my due, as something I earned and deserved? And when

something hard strikes me, where does my tongue go first — to praise, or to protest? These questions are not meant to shame you, my dear brother, my dear sister. They are the training ground of the heart. They are how you begin to become the kind of believer who can say Alhamdulillah when it is hardest of all to say — the believer whose last house on this earth becomes the first house waiting in the Garden.

A REMINDER CARRIED HOME

Keep your tongue moist with His praise

So let me gather it all for you as you leave this page. Between hope in Allah's boundless generosity and awareness of His perfect wisdom, keep your tongue moist with Alhamdulillah — in ease and in hardship, in the gift and in its loss. Say it over your food. Say it over your clothes. Say it after every prayer, thirty-three times, as the Sunnah teaches. Say it the moment you wake, because the very first blessing you receive each day is your own life returned to you after a small death in sleep. Say it when they ask how you are. And when good comes to you, do not merely enjoy it — trace it back to its Giver, because the Prophet ﷺ told us that Allah is pleased with the servant who eats a morsel and praises Him for it, and drinks a sip and praises Him for it.

Let your praise open your du'a, too, for ḥamd is itself the doorway to every request. Begin by praising Allah, then mention His names and His favours upon you, and only then ask Him for what you need — for your Lord loves to be praised, and the praise that opens your hands is the praise most likely to see them filled. Do this, and this small, light word, weighing almost nothing on your tongue, will grow heavier than the heavens and the earth on your scale. And when your last hour comes — as it comes for every soul — you will find, waiting on your lips, the word you loved your whole life long: *lā ilāha illā Allāh*. May Allah make us all among the people of praise.

☰ Your Action Plan: Become a Person of Praise

Don't just read — choose what you will act on this week.

1 Anchor Alhamdulillah to your meals and clothes

Before you eat and when you dress, consciously say Alhamdulillah and add 'without any might or power of my own.' Turn an autopilot moment into a wiped-out sin.

DAILY

Make it last: keep it daily until it becomes second nature — a habit for the rest of your life.

2 Guard your answer to 'How are you?'

Catch the reflex to complain. Answer with a sincere 'Alhamdulillah' and count one real blessing before you mention any struggle.

DAILY

Make it last: keep it daily until it becomes second nature — a habit for the rest of your life.

3 Open every du'a with praise

Before you ask Allah for anything, praise Him and name a few of His favours upon you. Let ḥamd be the door you knock on.

DAILY

Make it last: keep it daily until it becomes second nature — a habit for the rest of your life.

4 Add the post-prayer tasbih

After each obligatory salah, say Subḥān Allah, Alhamdulillah and Allāhu Akbar thirty-three times each. Start filling your scale with the word that fills it.

THIS WEEK

Make it last: once this first week is done, don't stop — carry it on as a lifelong habit.

🚩 The 7-Day Praise Challenge

For seven days, no meal passes your lips and no complaint leaves them without first a conscious Alhamdulillah. Each night, before you sleep, write down one thing Allah gave you that day that you would normally have overlooked, and praise Him for it by name. When something goes wrong that week, catch yourself and say 'Alhamdulillah 'alā kulli ḥāl' out loud, even if your heart lags behind your tongue. Seven days is only the beginning; the goal is a tongue that stays moist with His praise for the rest of your life, until its final word is lā ilāha illā Allāh.

Make it stick – and make it last

- ✓ **Write it down.** Put your chosen action on a sticky note on your mirror, desk, or fridge – somewhere you cannot miss it.
- ✓ **Print this plan** and tick each action off as you do it.
- ✓ **Set a daily reminder** on your phone or calendar so it never slips your mind.
- ✓ **Keep a one-line journal** each night – did I do it today? how did it go? – and watch your streak grow.

Don't aim for one good day or week – aim to keep it for life. A habit only counts once it outlives the challenge.