

Luqman's Advice to His Son

(part 1 of 2): Solutions for 21st Century Parents



Bring up children in the 21st century is no easier, nor is it any harder, than bringing up children in any century. Of course each time period has its unique problems but generic advice will always offer the best solutions because the nature of the human being remains unchanged. When God sent down the Quran He filled it with advice and reminders that would be equally useful for all time periods.

Luqman's advice to his son can be found in the Quran in the chapter named after him, chapter 31, verses 12 - 19. In addition to this Ibn Kathir, the renowned Islamic scholar and historian of the 14th century CE, wrote about Luqman in his book 'Stories of the Quran'. He used information obtained from the most reliable sources of the time. According to Ibn Kathir and most Islamic scholars Luqman was not a prophet but a wise man that God had blessed with wisdom. The earlier scholars, according to Ibn Kathir, were of the opinion that wisdom means discretion and religious understanding. In some traditions it is said that Luqman himself said that he maintained his honourable and noble qualities by, "*Lowering my gaze, watching my tongue, eating what is lawful, keeping my chastity, undertaking my promises, fulfilling my commitments, being hospitable to guests, respecting my neighbours, and discarding what does not concern me. All these made me the one you are looking at.*"^[1]

The wise man known as Luqman gave 10 pieces of advice to his son. Advice that is applicable now and can be followed and used by any parent wanting to raise a child in the light of Islam. It is said that if all parents

implemented Luqman's advice then there would be no need to worry about the fate of the children in the Hereafter because they have been shown the path that leads to Paradise. In the few short verses of the Quran that contain Luqman's advice to his son is the key to success in this life and on the Day of Judgement.

The advice a parent gives or chooses not to give their child is very important. One the Day of Judgement it would be devastating to hear your child say to God, "But my mum (or dad) didn't tell me that." Choosing the right words can be a difficult task so taking the advice of the prophets or our righteous predecessors such as Luqman is an excellent idea. Therefore let us examine just what Luqman said to his son and note that Luqman chose to speak in a respectful manner. Respect is important between any people engaging in a conversation but it is extremely important between family members. Nobody likes to be dictated to or to be yelled at especially when the unacceptable way of speaking comes from a beloved family member.

1. "...O my son! Join not in worship others with God. Verily! Joining others in worship with God is a great wrong indeed." (Quran 31:13)

Luqman calls his son "my son" rather than by name so as to emphasize the familial bond. He catches his attention encouraging him to listen carefully to what he is about to say. He then calls his son's attention to what is the most important thing in the eyes of God. The one who associates others with God, he says, does the biggest wrong or injustice to the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. That person also does a great wrong to himself because he offers himself up to the possibility of God's anger and an eternal punishment.

"Indeed God does not forgive that partners are associated with Him but He forgives anything besides that to whomsoever He wills." (Quran 4:48)

2. "And we have enjoined on man to be dutiful and good to his parents..." (Quran 31:14)

In the Quran God mentions the rights of parents in the same sentence as the most important aspect of Islam, worshipping God alone. This indicates that being kind to parents, honouring and respecting them, is extremely important in the way of life that is Islam.

"And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him and that you be dutiful to your parents..." (Quran 17:23)

Prophet Muhammad reinforced the duty to be kind to parents. A companion of the Prophet once asked him which of the many good deeds a man can do is the most loved by God. Prophet Muhammad answered him by saying, "To offer the prayer in its proper time". The companion then asked, "And what is next?" to which Prophet Muhammad replied, "To be good and dutiful to your parents..."^[2]

In the following part of Chapter Luqman, verse 14 God clarifies the difficulties mothers in particular go through raising their children and demands that the child gives thanks to his parents. God reminds us then that it is to Him that we will return so our first allegiance is to God alone, followed by devotion and kindness to our parents.

"And We have enjoined on man (to be dutiful and good) to his parents. His mother carried him, (increasing her) in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years - give thanks to Me and to your parents. Unto Me is the final destination." (Quran 31:14)

3. "O my son! If it be (anything) equal to the weight of a grain of mustard seed, and though it be in a rock, or in the heavens or in the earth, Allah will bring it forth..." (Quran 31:16)

Luqman then advises his son to remember the might and power that belongs to God. God's knowledge is perfect, anything that happens or will happen in this world is already known by God. God's might is absolute and should not be questioned, challenged or ignored by anyone.

Footnotes:

[1] Narrated Ibn Wahb in Chapter 16, Stories of the Quran by Ibn Kathir.

[2] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

(part 2 of 2): Begin with a Strong Foundation

God bestowed wisdom on Luqman. Wisdom entails following in the footsteps of the prophets by calling people to the worship of God alone. In addition to this it involves teaching them how to do this in the best possible way beginning with the most important aspects and so on. Luqman wanted the best for his son and gave him advice that would hold him in good stead in both this world and the Hereafter. This advice holds true in any era and parents struggling to bring up believing children today will greatly benefit from this advice. We have already discussed the first three important pieces of advice which were to worship God alone, to be dutiful to parents and to recognise that God has complete control over all affairs. In part 2 we continue the discussion.

4. "O my son! Offer prayer perfectly..." (Quran 31:17)

Luqman advises his son to pray regularly and in the right time frame. All parents should teach their children not only how to pray but why we pray and its importance. The Arabic word for prayer is *salah* and the word denotes connection. Prayer is our way of connecting with and maintaining

a connection with God. Prayer at fixed times serves as a reminder of why we are here and helps to direct thoughts and actions away from sin and onto the remembrance of God.

5. "...enjoin on people all that is good and forbid them from all that is evil..." (Quran 31:17)

Enjoining good and forbidding evil is a responsibility on every believer; rulers and subjects, men and women, each according to his or her ability. Prophet Muhammad said, "Whoever among you sees an evil action, let him change it with his hand (by taking action); and if he cannot, then with his tongue [by speaking out]; and if he cannot, then with his heart (by feeling that it is wrong), and that is the weakest of faith."^[1]

6. "...and bear with patience whatever befalls you..." (Quran 31:17)

Luqman advises his son to pray perfectly, enjoin good and forbid evil and then recommends patience when dealing with people for this purpose and in all matters. Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law Ali ibn Abi Talib defined patience as "seeking God's help".^[2] Remembering God and contemplating His greatness is the key to patience, and patience is a key to Paradise everlasting, therefore this was a wise advice indeed.

7. "And turn not your face away from men with pride..." (Quran 31:18)

Try not to act as if you are better than everybody else. Humility is a much desirable quality for any believer to aspire to. Humility can guide us to Paradise, just as its opposite, arrogance, can lead us into Hell. Satan's arrogance or lack of humility caused not only his expulsion from Paradise but condemned him and his followers to Hell. Prophet Muhammad did not behave towards others as if he was better than they, nor did he spurn manual work. One of his companions reported that Prophet Muhammad worked happily with servants or workers.

8. "...nor walk in insolence through the earth. Verily, Allah likes not any arrogant boaster." (Quran 31:18)

Walking with insolence through the land is another form of arrogance. It is as if Luqman wanted to emphasise the importance of humility. All people are equal in the eyes of God; the only thing that sets them apart is piety. Prophet Muhammad, his companions and the early generations of Muslims understood the concept of humility. The following is the story of a man who walked through the earth without insolence.

During his Caliphate, Umar ibn Al-Khattab was marching upon Damascus with his army. Abu Ubayda was with him. They came upon a little lake. Umar descended from his camel, took off his shoes, tied them together, and hung them on his shoulder. He then took the halter off his camel and they entered the water together. Seeing this in front of the army, Abu

Ubayda said, "O Commander of the Believers! How can you be so humble in front of all your men?" Umar answered, "Woe to you, Abu Ubayda! If only anyone else other than you thought this way! Thoughts like this will cause the downfall of the Muslims. Don't you see we were indeed a very lowly people? God raised us to a position of honour and greatness through Islam. If we forget who we are and wish other than the Islam which elevated us, the One who raised us surely will debase us."^[3]

**9. "And be moderate (or show no insolence) in your walking..."
(Quran 31:19)**

A native American proverb tells us that we will be known by the tracks we leave. Luqman is advising his son to walk gently on this earth and not to crash into situations with heavy boots. He is advising that patience and humility should be a person's normal, or as we say these days, default demeanour. Believers should be known for the humility, gentleness and mercy in their behaviour.

10. "...and lower your voice. Verily, the harshest of all voices is the braying of the asses." (Quran 31:19)

And finally Luqman advises his son to lower his voice. Being loud and harsh, he says, makes one's voice sound like the braying of donkeys. Shouting does not win hearts, it offends and alienates people.

Luqman the wise counsels his son with 10 pieces of advice. It is important to note that Luqman begins with the most important lesson; belief in One God. He also makes clear that joining others in worship with God is the only unforgivable sin. Next, after laying the foundations of faith, Luqman reminds his son of the essential values a believer must strive to acquire, while simultaneously shunning pride and arrogance. When parents can convey these 10 pieces of advice to their children they are laying the foundations for a happy life. If children can model this behaviour as demonstrated by their parents and caregivers it is even better.

Footnotes:

^[1] *Saheeh Muslim*

^[2] Ibn Qayyim al Jawziyyah, 1997, *Patience and gratitude*, English translation, United Kingdom, Ta-Ha Publishers. P12

^[3] As Sallabi, Dr Ali Muhammad. 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab: His Life and Times. International Islamic Publishing House Saudi Arabia. (2007)