Expand My Chest

From Pain to Certainty, and the Miracles of True Faith

ELZAHRAA HASSANE

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Expand My Chest: From Pain to Certainty, and the Miracles of True Faith
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The Qur'an is quoted in the Uthmani script. The English under each ayah is the author's rendering of its meaning for the general reader, not a formal translation. Hadith are cited by collection; a list of all references appears at the end of the book.

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First edition

To every heart that kept knocking at His door, even when it had no strength left.

Contents

Before You Begin 6

Prologue: Expand My Chest 8

Part One: When Your Heart Is Breaking **11**

1. You Can Lose It and Still Have Him 12
2. The Door You Keep Pulling 18
3. When the One You Trusted Hurts You 24
4. While You Are Still Waiting 28
5. When Your Heart Feels Heavy and You Don't Know Why . . . 38
6. The Hurt That Will Not Leave You 46

Part Two: He Has Not Left You **51**

7. Yusuf Could Not See the Palace From the Well 52
8. He Has Not Forgotten You 60
9. Come Back Before Later Becomes Too Late 66

Part Three: The Questions You Were Afraid to Ask **77**

10. If Allah Loves Me, Why Am I Suffering? 78
11. Why Does Allah Ask This of Me? 89
12. What Islam Really Says to Women 99

Part Four: Yaqeen, Believing Before You See **113**

13. When Everyone Tells You to Be Realistic 114
14. The First Thought Shaytan Plants 121
15. They Chained His Body, but Not His Faith 127

Part Five: Tawakkul, Letting Allah Carry It **139**

16. Strike the Sea With Your Staff 140

17. Trust the One Who Controls the Current 147
18. Ask the Owner of the House 153

Part Six: Where the Heart Finally Rests 159
19. Your Soul Is Hungry 160
20. Closer Than Your Jugular Vein 169
21. Every Dua You Cried Was Heard 175

Part Seven: What We Are Really Chasing 185
22. I'll Be Happy When 186
23. A Rider Resting Under a Tree 198
24. What No Eye Has Seen 207

Part Eight: When Faith Makes Miracles 213
25. One Hour That Can Change Your Life 214
26. Your Job Is Only to Plant the Seed 224
27. If He Loves You, He Will Make Them Love You 234
28. The Change Has to Come From Inside You 245
Closing: I Will Keep Knocking at Your Door 253
References 254
Index of Qur'an References 260
About the Author 263

A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Before You Begin

For years I have been talking to you.

Sometimes it was a minute on your screen, late at night, when you were scrolling because you could not sleep. Sometimes it was a story about Musa عليه السلام, or Maryam عليها السلام, or a man nobody noticed who turned out to be from the people of Jannah. Sometimes it was just one sentence that I needed to hear myself that day, and I thought maybe you needed it too.

Many of you wrote to me and said, "Please put these somewhere I can keep them." This book is that place.

Everything in it started as something I said to you. I have gathered those words, cleaned them up, and arranged them in an order that follows the road most of us walk. We begin where the pain is. Then we find out that Allah has not left us. Then we face the questions we were afraid to ask out loud. Then, little by little, the heart learns yaqeen, and tawakkul, and where it can finally rest. And at the end we arrive at the thing I have been trying to say all along: true faith does not only comfort you. It changes your life. It brings rizq, and love, and good people, and peace, in ways that look like miracles.

A few things before you start.

You do not have to read this book in order. If your heart is breaking tonight, begin with Part One. If you are tired of waiting, go to Chapter 4. If a question has been sitting in your chest for years, Part Three is for you. But if you can, read it from the beginning, because each part answers the question the one before it leaves open.

You will find the Qur'an on almost every page. I have given the Arabic, and under it the meaning in simple words, the way I would explain it to you if we were sitting together. The meaning is mine; the words of Allah are His. If you can, read the ayah slowly, out loud, before you read what I say about it.

And you will notice that I do not pretend pain is small. Sadness is real. Fear is real. Anxiety is real. Feeling them does not mean something is wrong with your faith. The prophets felt them too. What faith gives you is not a life without these feelings. It gives you Someone to carry them to.

The title comes from the dua of Musa عليه السلام before he faced Pharaoh. He did not ask for a stronger voice. He asked Allah to open his chest first. That is where this book begins, and that is my dua for you as you read: Rabbi ishrah li sadri. My Lord, open my chest.

Elzahraa Hassane

PROLOGUE

Expand My Chest

Not a weapon. Not an army. He said: My Lord, open my chest.

When Musa عليه السلام was sent to Pharaoh, he was being sent to the most dangerous audience in history. And before he faced him, he asked Allah for one thing.

Not a weapon. Not an army. He said:

Rabbi ishrah li sadri. My Lord, open my chest.

Wa yassir li amri. Make it easy for me.

Wahlul uqdatan min lisani. Untie the knot in my tongue.

Yafqahu qawli. So that they may grasp what I say.

قَالَ رَبِّ ٱشْرَحْ لِى صَدْرِى ﴿٢٥﴾ وَيَسِّرْ لِىٓ أَمْرِى ﴿٢٦﴾ وَٱحْلُلْ عُقْدَةً مِّن لِّسَانِى ﴿٢٧﴾ يَفْقَهُوا۟ قَوْلِى ﴿٢٨﴾

My Lord, open my chest for me. Make my task easy for me. And untie the knot in my tongue, so that they may understand what I say.

SURAH TA-HA 20:25-28

The chest first

Notice the order. He asked for his chest to be opened before he asked for his tongue to be loosened. The chest first. Then the tongue.

Because a voice that moves people was never born in the mouth. It comes from a heart that already trusts the One who sent it, a heart that is certain of Allah.

So when you stand up to convey a message and your voice shakes, know this. The problem is not in your tongue. It is something sitting inside your chest. Fear. Doubt. Old voices. That is what needs to be cleared first.

And a shaking voice is not weakness. That is Musa عليه السلام before Pharaoh. And the answer is the same answer he was given.

Where this book begins

I did not write this book for the stage. I wrote it for you, if your chest is tight tonight. Maybe you lost someone. Maybe you have been pulling at a door for years and it will not open. Maybe the person you trusted most is the one who hurt you. Maybe you pray and you are not sure anyone is listening.

Most of these pages started as short messages. A few minutes each, spoken to one person at a time, for the hour when the house is quiet and the heart is loud. I put them together here so you can read them slowly.

You will notice I do not start with what to do. I start with what you feel. Loss. Rejection. Betrayal. Loneliness. Fear. Musa عليه السلام stood in front of Pharaoh with a knot in his tongue and a heavy chest, and Allah did not shame him for it. He answered him.

So this whole book is that one dua. Rabbi ishrah li sadri. Before you decide anything, before you forgive anyone, before you try again, ask for the chest first. When the chest opens, the rest gets easier. That is what Musa عليه السلام was given, and that is what I am asking Allah for you.

Ask for your chest to be opened. The rest will follow.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

A voice that moves people was never born in the mouth. It comes from a heart that already trusts the One who sent it.

PART ONE

When Your Heart Is Breaking

قَالَ إِنَّمَآ أَشْكُوا۟ بَثِّى وَحُزْنِىٓ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ

He said, "I only complain of my grief and my sorrow to Allah."

SURAH YUSUF 12:86

This part is for the night you cannot sleep. The person who left. The door that closed. The years of waiting. The heaviness you cannot explain to anyone. We are not going to rush past any of it. We are going to sit with it, and then we are going to find out where Allah was the whole time.

CHAPTER ONE

You Can Lose It and Still Have Him

Sometimes Allah removes something you were deeply attached to because your heart had started believing: I cannot live without this.

You lost something. Maybe someone. And right now your heart is repeating one sentence over and over: I cannot live without this.

Listen. Sometimes Allah removes something you were deeply attached to because your heart had started believing exactly that. "I cannot live without this." Then Allah teaches you: you can lose it, and still have Him.

It does not feel like a lesson right now. It feels like the floor has gone. So let us go slowly.

When Allah removes someone

Don't keep asking why Allah removed them. You remember the moments you loved. Allah knows the moments you never saw. You know what you lost. Allah knows what He saved you from. Trust the One who saw the whole story.

Sometimes the person you are struggling to let go of is the very person Allah is teaching you to live without. Not every attachment is meant to become permanent. Sometimes letting go is part of healing.

You think your life changed because they left. Maybe your life changed because Allah finally removed what was preventing

you from moving forward. Some endings do not destroy your future. They release you into it.

I know how that sounds when the loss is still fresh. Nobody is asking you to feel released today. Just keep praying. And let Allah show you, in His time, what He was doing.

Three kinds of loss

Allah told us this would happen. He did not hide it from us. In Surat Al-Baqarah He says:

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُم بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ ٱلْخَوْفِ وَٱلْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ ٱلْأَمْوَٰلِ وَٱلْأَنفُسِ
وَٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ وَبَشِّرِ ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ ﴿١٥٥﴾ ٱلَّذِينَ إِذَآ أَصَٰبَتْهُم مُّصِيبَةٌ قَالُوٓا۟ إِنَّا لِلَّهِ
وَإِنَّآ إِلَيْهِ رَٰجِعُونَ ﴿١٥٦﴾ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَٰتٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ
وَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٥٧﴾

We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth, lives and fruits. But give good news to the patient. Those who, when a calamity strikes them, say: We belong to Allah, and to Him we return. Upon them are blessings from their Lord, and mercy. And they are the ones who are guided.

SURAH AL-BAQARAH 2:155-157

We will put you to the test, no doubt about it. As a believer in Allah you should be mentally prepared to be tested with fear, with

hunger, with lack of money, lack of people and lack of fruits. You don't know the way you will be tested. Your test is going to be different from everyone else's. The last generation was tested in one way. The next generation will be tested in another. But you will face it.

Notice the order in the ayah. Fear comes first. Before the horrible thing happens, there is fear. There are people who are afraid they will never get a job. There is going to be fear. And after it has happened, there is hunger. There will be trials before the difficulty, and trials after the difficulty too. And you will face all kinds of them.

Then Allah names three kinds of losses: wealth, people, and fruits.

Wealth is your bank account, your clothes, the things you own. Money will go down.

People. The people who are killed. The people we love and the people we need. And sometimes even something within ourselves. This is something we have to deal with.

Fruits. Your children. The fruit of your labour. When you work hard on something and you don't get it. When you put too much into something and you lose it.

Find your loss on this list. Was it the money? The person? The thing you worked years for? Allah named it in this ayah long before it happened to you. It did not surprise Him. And in the same ayah He says: give good news to the patient.

I am sorry you are going through this. But congratulations to those who have sabr.

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا ٱسْتَعِينُوا بِٱلصَّبْرِ وَٱلصَّلَوٰةِ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ مَعَ ٱلصَّـٰبِرِينَ

O you who believe, seek help through patience and prayer. Indeed, Allah is with the patient.

SURAH AL-BAQARAH 2:153

How do you get sabr? By prayer.

And here is the thing I want you to hold on to. When you lose all of these, Allah is still with you. The only thing that will truly devastate you is losing Allah. Everything else can be taken, and the One holding you is still there.

We belong to Allah

Go back to the ayah of Surat Al-Baqarah we read above, the one that names the three kinds of loss. Look at how Allah describes a special kind of sabireen in it. The patient ones who, whenever calamity hits them, respond: we belong to Allah, no doubt about it, and only to Him we will return.

Our starting point as humanity is Allah. He sent us out on this road on earth and He told us: there are going to be things that scare you, distractions, times of hunger, difficulties. But in the end, you are going to come back home to Me.

So the people of ultimate sabr remind themselves: I started with Allah, and I am going to end with Allah. This is only a bump on the road. This is not where my road ends. The sickness will go. My road ends with Allah.

I know it is not easy. I salute you. And Allah Himself salutes you. Those are the people upon whom there are salutations, blessings, and a special loving mercy and care from Allah.

Everything you are going through here, He sees. I know you have had a tough time. But you are going to be happy when Allah makes it up to you. And the ones committed to guidance are the ones who, while going through a hard time, still hold on to Allah. Still believe in Him, whatever the temptations.

Harm has touched me

Sometimes Allah shakes you because He does not want you to have anyone else in your life to turn to except Him. Sometimes this is the love of Allah. He takes everything away from you, so that you find Him.

Look at Ayoub عليه السلام. He got so sick, and he was in so much pain and suffering, that his skin was covered with sores from head to foot. He was so sick that even his family abandoned him.

And what did he say?

وَأَيُّوبَ إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُۥٓ أَنِّى مَسَّنِىَ ٱلضُّرُّ وَأَنتَ أَرْحَمُ ٱلرَّٰحِمِينَ

And Ayoub, when he called to his Lord: Harm has touched me, and You are the Most Merciful of the merciful.

SURAH AL-ANBIYA 21:83

Ayoub عليه السلام cried out to Allah and said: Ya Allah, harm has touched me. He did not even say, Ya Allah, You made me sick. Harm has touched me. And You are the Most Merciful, the One who is always merciful.

Look at the respect. Look at the way you should be asking something from Allah.

Then you find somebody who gets a little pain and he turns angry at Allah. He becomes stubborn. As if he is saying: Allah, You made me feel pain, so I am not going to worship You. I am not going to pray. As if Allah would miss something if you did not pray. Allah does not need us. We always need Him.

Look, the pain is real. Even the anger is human. But where do you take it? Ayoub عليه السلام took his pain to Allah, and look how he took it. With respect.

Then what happened after Ayoub عليه السلام called with this dua?

فَٱسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُۥ فَكَشَفْنَا مَا بِهِۦ مِن ضُرٍّ وَءَاتَيْنَٰهُ أَهْلَهُۥ وَمِثْلَهُم مَّعَهُمْ رَحْمَةً مِّنْ عِندِنَا وَذِكْرَىٰ لِلْعَٰبِدِينَ

So We responded to him, and We removed the harm that was upon him, and We gave him back his family, and the like of them with them, as a mercy from Us and a reminder for those who worship.

SURAH AL-ANBIYA 21:84

Allah is saying: then We responded to him. We lifted every harm and disease he suffered. We brought his family back to him, and others like them with them. He was given a new family, more children. Life was put back into him.

And Allah calls this a mercy that came especially from Him, and a reminder. A powerful reminder for those who worship, and for those who are in pain and suffering right now. A reminder for you.

It is telling us to follow the same way. Be patient. Be grateful. Be polite when you ask something from Allah. Say: harm has touched me, and You are the Most Merciful.

So let me say it to you the way I say it to myself. What you lost is gone. And He is still here. The thing you lost was never the one holding you up. He was.

You can lose it and still have Him.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

You can lose it and still have Him.

CHAPTER TWO

The Door You Keep Pulling

What if the thing you thought was ruining your life was actually protecting you from something you could not see?

What if that door had to close? What if that person had to leave? What if that plan had to fail?

We usually decide whether something is good or bad based on what we can see right now. And right now, all you can see is a door that did not open. You are standing in front of it, pulling.

You have checked your phone a hundred times for the reply that is not coming. You have replayed that conversation, looking for the moment you got it wrong. You asked Allah why, and then felt guilty for asking. Stay with me in front of that door for a minute. There is something behind it you cannot see from where you are standing.

Some doors close to protect you

Stop crying over every door that closed. You saw an opportunity. Allah saw where it could lead. You saw disappointment. Allah may have been redirecting your entire life to something better. Not every closed door is rejection. Some doors close to protect you, and to pave the whole path ahead of you.

Don't be heartbroken because someone rejected you. You only saw the rejection. Allah saw what would have happened if they had stayed. You saw a closed door. Allah saw what was behind that door. Sometimes rejection is not a loss. It is Allah's protection.

That job. That relationship. That opportunity. That plan. You call them the things that "didn't work out." But you don't know what

Allah prevented through them. Some things worked out perfectly by not working out at all. You are grieving the plan. Allah knows the destination.

Sometimes the door you keep pulling is protecting you from harm you cannot see. So bring your disappointment to Allah. Do not hide it from Him. Bring it, and trust His wisdom beyond what you understand.

Allah says:

وَعَسَىٰٓ أَن تَكْرَهُوا شَيْـًٔا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ وَعَسَىٰٓ أَن تُحِبُّوا شَيْـًٔا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَّكُمْ وَٱللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

Perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you. And perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. Allah knows, and you do not know.

SURAH AL-BAQARAH 2:216

There are things you are crying about today that one day you may thank Allah for not giving you. There are people you miss today that one day you may understand why Allah removed. Sometimes wisdom becomes visible only later.

But there is a story in the Qur'an that completely challenges the way we judge what is good and what is bad. The story of Musa عليه السلام and Al-Khidr.

Three things that made no sense

One day people asked Musa عليه السلام who was the most knowledgeable person on earth, and Musa answered, "It is me." But Allah wanted to teach

Musa a deeper lesson. He told him: I will send you to a servant of Mine who has been given knowledge that you do not have.

That servant was Al-Khidr, a man granted a special knowledge by Allah, knowledge of the wisdom behind events, beneath what appears on the surface. And Musa عليه السلام chose to travel with him, to learn what Allah had taught him.

Almost immediately, something happened that made absolutely no sense to him.

They got onto a boat belonging to poor people. These people worked at sea. This boat was their livelihood. They were kind enough to take the two travellers on board. And then Al-Khidr damaged their boat.

Of course Musa عليه السلام objected. Why would you damage the boat of poor people who just helped you? From what Musa could see, this was bad. There was no wisdom in it.

Until later, when Al-Khidr told him what he could not see. There was a king ahead of them who was taking every good boat by force. A cruel king who took any boat in good condition for himself. When he saw this damaged boat, he would not want it. So Allah protected this boat for its owners, the poor ones.

Suddenly the whole story changes. The damage was not there to destroy the boat. The damage was there to save it.

And I want you to think about that for a moment. Because sometimes we are standing in front of the damaged boat in our own lives. Something did not work out. A relationship ended. A marriage did not happen. You did not get the job. You lost something you desperately wanted to keep. And all you can see is: why did Allah allow this to happen?

But you can see the boat. You cannot see the king ahead.

Then something even harder happened. Al-Khidr killed a young boy. Musa عليه السلام was shocked. How could there possibly be wisdom in this?

But later Al-Khidr explained that Allah knew what Musa عليه السلام did not know. That child would have grown up to cause great difficulty to his believing parents, and would have led them into disbelief and disobedience. And Allah intended to replace him with one better in purity and compassion. What looked like the cruellest loss was, for those parents, a mercy for the sake of their destiny in the hereafter.

Again, Musa عليه السلام saw the loss. He could not see what was coming after it.

This one is the hardest. Some of you lost something so painful that nobody around you dares to say there was wisdom in it. I am not going to say it either. I am only going to say what the Qur'an says: Allah knew what those parents could not know, and what He gave them after was better. You do not have to understand it today. He knew. That is enough for today.

And then there was the wall. They entered a town whose people were cold, and refused even to give them food. Yet in that town Al- Khidr noticed a wall that was about to collapse, and without being asked he rebuilt it. For free.

Again, Musa عليه السلام could not understand why. He said: if you had wished, you could have taken payment for this.

But Al-Khidr saw what Musa عليه السلام could not see. That wall belonged to two orphan boys. Beneath it was a treasure that was meant for them, and their father had been a righteous man. If the wall had collapsed too soon, the treasure would have been exposed and taken by the people of that town. So Allah ordered Al- Khidr to protect it, by building the wall up until the boys were grown and could take it themselves.

And this is the lesson Allah wanted Musa عليه السلام to learn. There are a lot of good things that are delayed because you are not