

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF THE PROPHET - WHAT IS THAT EXAMPLE?

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Many Muslims make use of the following verse as support for the belief that Prophetic practices must be followed as part of the Prophet's 'Sunnah' which includes his personal preferences for example, keeping a beard, what he wore, the way he walked, how he ate and all his personal likes and dislikes including all his characteristics. Quite apart from the fact that the 'Sunna of the Prophet' is not even mentioned once in the Quran ([See article: Understanding the term 'Sunna' from a Quran's perspective](#)), we note that the verse used to support this understanding has a completely different meaning.

033.021

"Verily in the messenger of God ye have a good example (Arabic: Us'watun Hasanatun) for him who looks to God and the Last Day, and remembers God much"

Us'watun

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ

Hasanatun

[Illustration - Joseph Islam](#)

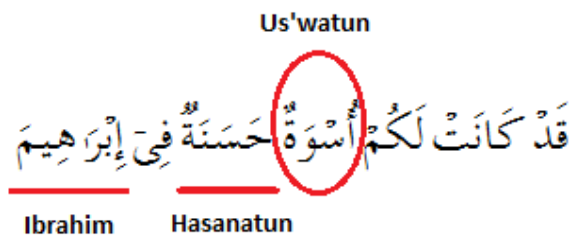
UNDERSTANDING THE TERM 'US'WATUN HASANATUN'

The correct and best way to initially understand a term, is to see if and how the term is being used in other parts of the Quran.

We note, that the same term is indeed being used in another part of the Quran to describe Prophet Abraham ^(pbuh) with an elaboration of its meaning.

060.004

"There is for you a **good example (Arabic: Us'watun Hasanatun)** in **Abraham (Arabic: Ibrahim)** and those with him, when they said to their people: "We are clear of you and of whatever you worship besides God. We have rejected you, and there has arisen, between us and you, enmity and hatred for ever, - unless you believe in God and Him alone": But not when Abraham said to his father: "I will pray for forgiveness for thee, though I have no power (to get) aught on thy behalf from God." (They prayed): "Our Lord! in Thee do we trust, and to Thee do we turn in repentance: to Thee is (our) Final Goal"



[Illustration - Joseph Islam](#)

This is once again confirmed a couple of verses later in:

060.006

"There was indeed in them a **good example (Arabic: Us'watun Hasanatun)** for you to follow for those whose hope is in God and in the Last Day. But if any turn away, truly God is Free of all Wants, Worthy of all Praise"

The first significant point to note is that the term 'Us'watun Hasanatun' (good example) is NOT exclusive for Prophet Muhammad ^(pbuh). If 'good example' entails all manner of Prophetic personal practices as part of his Sunnah, how do believers then follow the personal Sunna of Prophet Abraham ^(pbuh) and his followers as advised in 60:4 and 60:6? Note that in both verses, Abraham ^(pbuh) is mentioned along with those that followed him.

Therefore, from the above verses we acquire the real context of the meaning of the term 'Us'watun Hasanatun' (Good example) which is clearly not a reference to the personal practices of Prophet Muhammad ^(pbuh), but rather:

- (i) Belief in God alone.
- (ii) **No** worship to any other than to God.
- (iii) Complete reliance in God and firm belief in the Last Day.

If one re-reads verse 033.021 in its complete context starting from verse 9, the context of the Prophet's 'Good example' becomes clear. Similar to the context of Abraham^(pbuh), Muhammad's^(pbuh) 'good example' is that of one who places complete trust and belief in God and the final day.

It is also important to note the exception, where Prophet Abraham's^(pbuh) example is not to be followed which had a specific context and reason as explained by verses 9:113-4. "That it is not befitting for the Prophet and those who believe that they should pray forgiveness for idolaters even though they be of kin after it is clear to them that they are companions of the fire" (9:113).

Abraham's^(pbuh) exception is then cited as an example in that he only prayed for his idolatrous father because of a promise he had already made to him but disassociated himself after he realised his father was an enemy to God (9:114). The promise that Prophet Abraham^(pbuh) made to pray for his father can be seen in 19:47.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Context is **key** to understanding the real purport of the message of a given verse. Sadly, many verses are often taken out of context and words are interpreted in a way that do not cross reference other parts of the scripture. Rather, words are translated in a way to often support theologies which find no basis in the Quran.

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