

Life Challenge Pointers

Muslims and Christians at Prayer

People of faith are also people of prayer. In interacting with people of other faiths every follower of Jesus Christ has many opportunities to pray with and for Muslims whenever possible.

Why not make this your ambition? -

Whenever you hear the call to prayer, pray for Muslims.

Piety and devotion

... are part of everyday Muslim life. They are always reminded of the prayer rituals, five times a day. The dawn call to prayer, before the noise of the city has properly started, will linger in your mind if ever you have lived in a Muslim-dominated area. Chanted in Arabic by the *muezzin* (the one who gives the *azaan* or call to prayer) its message is forceful and persistent:

Allahu-Akbar = God is great!

This call to prayer rings out after sunrise, around noon, in the early afternoon, at sunset and about one hour thereafter and cuts right into one's daily activities. Its meaning is:

God is most great! God is most great!

I testify there is no god but God (repeated)

I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God (repeated)

Come to prayer (repeated)

Come to success (repeated)

God is most great!

There is no god but God!

Prayer is better than sleep (at dawn only).

As a Christian, you will never want to join with Muslims in this prayer because you cannot affirm Muhammad as a prophet fulfilling the Bible's marks of a prophet. (See Deuteronomy 18:20-22)

Ritual Prayer - Salat

Salat is the second of the five pillars of Islam. From early childhood, after the prescribed ablutions, all Muslims are required to offer their ritual prayers in strict fulfilment of all the rules set by Muhammad. These are only acceptable in Arabic language. Usually women say their prayers at home. (Women are not allowed to pray in prominent positions and are considered to disturb men at prayer!) If you have Muslim guests you might offer them to pray privately if they so wish.

Why don't you use this time in personal prayer for them?

What do they recite in their ritual prayer? It is the same all over the world:

Praise be to Allah, The Beneficent, the Merciful.

*Owner of the Day of Judgment,
Thee (alone) we worship: Thee (alone) we ask for help.
Show us the straight path,
The path of those whom Thou hast favored:
Not (the path) of those who earn Thine anger,
Nor of those who go astray.*

This is the first Sura/chapter in the Qur'an, known as *al-fatihah*. Some Muslims may ask us: How do you pray? In response we can share how and when we use the Lord's Prayer and what it means to us. We can talk about our personal communion with God in prayer and ask them what prayer means to them.

Muslims may share about their ritual confession which affirms that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the messenger of God. If they want to know our Christian Creed, we might share with them John 17:3 as a central truth: **"This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."**

During their annual pilgrimage to Mecca, Muslims recite the following invocation in Arabic over and over during the first days of the *hajj* and before going to Mount Arafat.

*You call us, we are here, O Allah! We are here!
We are here, there is none besides you.
Praise and good deeds belong to you, and the empire!
There is none but you!*

The Bible is full of wonderful examples of God's people engaged in prayer. Pray with "open windows" (Daniel), pray on your knees (Paul), or when interacting with others (Nehemiah), or during family devotions (Jesus)...Don't hide from other people that you are a man or woman of prayer.

Personal, informal prayer, or Du'a

It is helpful to know the difference between ritual prayer/*salat*, and free prayers/*du'a*. A *du'a* consists of invocations, requests, intercessions, through memorized and freely expressed prayers. The literal meaning of *du'a* is "**cry**" or **call**. Many of these prayers are written down in prayer manuals. Individuals will at times supplement these with their own personal prayers which can be expressed in vernacular language. One of my Muslim friends, telling me of her family problems, said: "If it were not for prayer I do not know how I could have coped."

Most Muslims will be grateful, if we tell them we are praying for them, and will nearly always welcome our offer to pray for them right away, especially in times of illness, family crisis, or as they face exams.

Guidelines for praying with Muslim men or women

Muslims may even pay money to their "Holy men" to say prayers for them and often will appreciate it if we offer to pray for them freely. Here are some helpful hints how to do this:

- *Praise God greatly at the beginning of the prayer* (to Muslims God is Creator, Provider, Redeemer, but they cannot call Him Father!) Muslims are high on praising God. Pray in the Name of Jesus – the Messiah.
- *Name the person for whom you are praying to God* (sick child, mother)
- *Make the request, perhaps also quoting Scripture* (particularly a prophet – Isaiah, Jesus), but resist the temptation of using Scripture as an evangelistic tool in prayer.
- *Conclude the prayer in the name of Jesus, the Messiah.*
- *Choose your vocabulary carefully* throughout the prayer – don't use religious jargons, which puts people off.

Sample prayers for women

Muslim women are, like us, rather nervous of the dangers of childbirth, but they are moreover fearful because of many superstitions and practices which are part of their culture. Often these mothers ask their Christian friends/midwives to pray for them. This is a great chance to show our trust in God and care in times of need. Make a point to visit a mother with a newborn baby and use the opportunity to teach along the following lines during several visits to the home:

“You are now the mother of a new baby. God has brought him or her safely into this world and has kept you safe too. Let us thank God for his love and goodness to you and for bringing this new life into your family. - Jesus the Messiah, the eternal Lord and Saviour of this world, was born as a baby, just like your baby. His mother Mary experienced the pain of labour as you have, and rejoiced in the birth of her baby as you have. Jesus, son of Mary, came into this world to save us from sin and to make us righteous before God. God has given physical life to you and your baby by the process of natural birth. He also wants to give us spiritual life. This is his gift which comes through faith in Jesus the Messiah.”

Here is a prayer for use at the birth of a child:

“O Creator God, we thank you that through your goodness this child has been safely born and that the mother has been freed from suffering. Now we ask you that they both might also obtain eternal life through the sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah.”

It fills me with enormous joy whenever I have an opportunity to pray for my friends. One remarked: “When you pray, I feel the nearness of God!”

Prayer is not evangelism, but it is standing in the presence of God, which touches people. Sometime later, I was able to give this friend a Bible.

We encourage and urge you

Let us use this most wonderful privilege, often gladly granted by our Muslim friends, to pray with them quietly or openly. We recognize each other as people of prayer and devotion.

Let us use every opportunity to pray with Muslims.

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