When we pray...
Some years ago I took a group of youthful passionate British Christians on a pre-arranged visit to a large UK mosque. We’d had to sort out protocols around dress and headscarves beforehand, and deal with various apprehensions and high spirits. What is memorable from the visit was the awed surprise of the group to the reverential focus on prayer in the mosque. The thoughtful follow-up conversation saw them choosing to process questions about what they focus on when they arrive at church, and the place of prayer in their lives.

The theme of this webzine is prayer: it is about a practice at the heart of Muslim daily life and at the same time about a privileged aspect of lived Christian experience. It is a natural topic of conversation when Muslims and Christians get together and yet one that can often be at cross-purpose because of differing assumptions about the nature of prayer. The articles selected for this issue are intended to bring clarity to these encounters. Of course, they may also trigger reflection on your own prayer life.

The main articles are all written by Western Christians who have lived in Islamic contexts. They are interspersed by reflections on their journey in prayer from four women Believers from a Muslim Background (each used the questions shown here in the box, as stimulus to their reflections). Our journey with them begins with one of the reflections followed by Moyra Dale’s comprehensive article that looks at ‘Muslim Women In Prayer’, lifting a veil on the daily and seasonal rhythms of prescribed prayer practiced by our friends and the part extemporary prayer has within that. The second article, which follows on, provides thorough, helpful detail about Salah, the five-times a day prayer at the heart of Muslim practice. Following a second reflection we have an article by Louise Simon which explores contemporary perspectives on du’a. She has brought together insights culled from conversations which women involved in the When Women Speak I-View course have had with their Muslim friends with discussion to be found on the internet, in order to identify the overlaps and distinctives between Muslim and Christian extemporary prayer. In this exploratory part of the webzine I provide a brief article on ‘The Qur’an and Prayer’ to supplement detail prior to Colin Edwards’ musings on experiences and arising conversation with Sufi friends. His article ‘In Touch with the Divine’ considers the icon-like role of Sufi recitation of the Qur’an and other prayers, and the longing it represents.

QUESTIONS TO HELP BMBS REFLECT:

1. Can you describe for us the place of prayer in your life as a follower of Jesus, and how you like to pray?
2. What was it like learning to pray to Jesus, after learning Muslim prayer? Was it the same/different, hard/easy?
3. How did you learn to pray? What were your models?
4. Is there anything you miss about Muslim prayer?
The final article sits between the last two reflections. In it Anna Shean powerfully reminds us of the access we have to the Throne of Grace as she sets out the gentle and important ways she shares this when ‘Praying with My Muslim Friends’. The closing of the final reflection from a BMB sister bursts with the joy of discovering this access. It testifies to a hunger for communion with God which is only fulfilled through Jesus.

As it happens even as I was finalising the editing for this webzine my local church Home Group had chosen to start using the online ‘Prayer Course’ <https://prayercourse.org/about/>, and a Zoom Bible Study group I have been asked to teach will be looking at John 17 (Jesus’ prayer for his disciples) this week. The course and the passage are two good avenues for moving on if reading this webzine stirs you to want to explore how to develop your own prayer life. Of course the articles and reflections of the webzine may well provide you with sufficient signposts for this stage of your journey. I commend them to you for the rich insights they offer.

Carol Walker
Reflection
1. The place is my room to pray. I can be alone and nobody disturbs me. Sometimes I use Psalms to pray, especially when I want to express my personal private needs.

2. It was hard to learn to pray. Before coming to Christ it was a set of words which I didn’t understand and it was forbidden to translate it. I felt myself repeating after another person who wrote it, and I was always afraid that I might have the same life as that person. The hardest thing was to realize and accept that God is not far, but He is near, He is closer to me as I’ve ever imagined. I was always amazed that He heard my prayers and answered them. I was surprised and happy when I was told that Jesus is not a "Russian". It was good news for me as I didn’t want to come to Russian god after M god.

   The prayer is a place where I can accept myself by His grace. It is a time when I can be comforted and be assured by Him that there is nothing to be afraid of.

3. The leader of our Bible study said that I can say anything I want to God in my prayers. I was scared, because in my understanding you can’t say what you want to say. I read how king David prayed, I read how Jesus prayed for His disciples. And it helped me to have an understanding of prayer.

   Sometimes I don’t know how and what to do, and I just go to my room and lying in bed I start to pray to understand the situation.
Muslim Women in Prayer
Introduction

The formal salah (namuz) prayers of Islam that the faithful Muslim prays five times daily are the basis of Muslim life and practice. Beyond the obligatory salah, the devout Muslim draws on a generous variety of pious practices. These are centred around different forms of adoration and petition, recitation of the Qur’an, and the rich practices of devotion in Ramadan. This paper asks how women interact with the requirements of salah: and explores the du’a’ prayers of supplication, and the dhikr prayers where the worshipper meditates on God and His characteristics. We look at how the three kinds of prayer interact, the place given to each kind of prayer, and how people experience them. Thence we can ask how these prayers and expressions of heart-longing may be a bridge between the Muslim and Christian understandings of who God is and how we may approach Him.

The English word ‘prayer’ is used to cover these different practices. However it is also often a source of confusion in conversation between Muslims and Christians. In Islam the word salah refers only to the prescribed liturgical form of set phrases and actions in prayer. This is how most Muslims understand the word ‘prayer’ (although often its use by English speakers is closer to du’a’). So I have chosen to primarily use the Arabic terms here, or to draw on synonyms in referring to different forms of Muslim devotion.

صلاة - Salah: Liturgical Prayer

The sheikha nears the end of her lecture in the women’s upper area as a male voice sounds the call to prayer throughout the mosque. Some of the women rise and go through to the balcony to pray, overlooking the main area of the mosque where the men pray, as the
sheikha continues her talk. She finishes, quietly whispering an invocation, while most of
the rest of the women move to take their places in the upper hall, standing in about five
rows of fifteen women together, the sheikha in the middle of the front row. As the male
voice from below sounds, they stand, bow, kneel and prostrate together. A woman runs to
join those who are praying, flinging on her all-covering full-length coat. As the prayer
moves onto the non-compulsory raka', about a third of the women leave, and the rest
continue, no longer so closely in time with each other. The sheikha says a general petition
through the microphone. Some of the women are finishing prayers, and others stand and
chat.

One of the five pillars of Islam, salah is incumbent on every believer – but gender
influences its performance. The Muslim Woman’s Handbook, Khattab (1994:1) notes:

In Islam, religious duties are to be performed by men and women alike. All
Muslims, whether male or female, are required to pray five times daily and to
fast in Ramadan. Having said that, however, there are some differences in the
ways in which men and women are to go about performing these acts of
worship, which sisters need to be aware of.

The performance of salah is constrained by rules of cleanliness and covering.

Purity and Modesty

When the body becomes impure, through fluids, solids or gas emerging from the body’s
boundaries, the worshipper needs to perform ablutions again to be able to pray salah.

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1 Round of standing, bowing, kneeling, prostrating in prayer.
Following sexual intercourse, discharge from the sexual organs, menstruation, or childbirth, complete bathing is required in order to regain the condition of permitted purity. All the conditions of major defilement which require complete washing apply to women, whereas only half affect men. This means that all women from puberty to menopause are ritually unclean for about a quarter of the time: unable to do salah during their monthly period until the flow has ceased, and they can wash to purify themselves again. (Some commentators suggest that this intrinsic impediment is part of the reason for the stinging Hadith, that women are lacking in brains and religion.)

If women are married and involved in sexual relationships, or cleaning up young children (or caring for older family members), they may be unable to perform salah for the majority of the time.

The rules for covering during salah require men to be covered from the navel to the knees. Women however must be covered from head to foot, leaving only the face and hands showing (and not close-fitting clothing which shows the body shape). The covering required of women to pray salah to God, even in their inner room, is much the same as the covering required for conservative Muslim women with non-familial males.

Place of prayer
The activity of salah can consecrate almost any place for worship, but worship offered in the mosque gains more merit. Saqib assures us, “wherever a Muslim might be he can offer his (sic) salah but the reward of a salah offered in a mosque is far greater than


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² See Salah, this issue, for further discussion of purity and prayer: also https://whenwomenspeak.net/issue/vol-2-no-1-april-2018/.
³ Sahih Bukhari, Arabic-English translation, Vol.1, Hadith No. 301. See also Vol.3, Hadith No. 826.
that offered in an ordinary place,” (1997:17): Emerick quotes it as twenty-five times better (1997:122). Cragg comments:

“...everyone’s prayer mat is a portable mosque and wherever they choose to spread it they can find their Qiblah\(^4\) and worship God. ... Nevertheless the noon prayer on Fridays is to be said as far as possible in the place of corporate prayer. When so said its four \textit{raka’at}\(^5\) are reduced to two.” (Cragg, 1985:99)

But here Cragg writes only of men: women are not able to perform \textit{salah} in public places with the same freedom as men. I have met women in sheltered places, even in old and ruined mosques, putting their handbag in front as a \textit{sutra} (barrier) and prostrating on the dusty bare stone floor; but for many Muslim women in different countries, cultural and religious requirements of modesty and purity constrain their freedom to make public places into spaces of worship.

Increasingly around the world more women are now going to the mosque for teaching and memorising the Qur’an and while there, joining in \textit{salah} and \textit{dhikr} prayers. They have their own space in the upper area of the mosque: however when the time for Friday prayers comes and men arrive in their numbers, the women’s space is circumscribed or sometimes taken over completely for men’s use. Men pray at the mosque, but the \textit{hadith} attest to the home as women’s traditional place of worship.

It was narrated from ‘Abd-Allaah ibn Mas’ood that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “A woman’s prayer in her room is better than her

\(^4\) Towards the direction of Mecca.
\(^5\) Each round of standing, bowing, prostrating and standing again in \textit{salah} (see Salah, this issue).
prayer in her courtyard, and her prayer in her cabinet is better than her prayer in her room.”

The Prophetﷺ said: “A woman’s prayer in her room is better than her prayer in her courtyard, and her prayer in her closet is better than her prayer in her room.”

Another hadith reports that Umm Humayd came to the Prophetﷺ and said, “O Messenger of Allah, I like to pray with you.” He is reported to have said, “I know that you like to pray with me, but your prayer in your room is better for you than your prayer in your courtyard and your prayer in your courtyard is better for you than your praying in your house, and your prayer in your house is better for you than your prayer in the mosque of your people, and your prayer in the mosque of your people is better for you than your prayer in my mosque.” So she issued orders that a prayer-place be prepared for her in the furthest and darkest part of her house, and she used to pray there until she met Allah (i.e., died).”

**Faith transmission**

_I knocked on my Muslim neighbour’s door one day and she opened it, dressed as she so often was in the all-covering prayer skirt and top – they were always convenient to hand so that we could be properly covered if any man was at the door. As we sat and drank_

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7 [https://www.facebook.com/haqiqatjou/posts/i-walked-by-the-closet-in-my-home-this-morning-and-i-was-surprised-i-was-surpris](https://www.facebook.com/haqiqatjou/posts/i-walked-by-the-closet-in-my-home-this-morning-and-i-was-surprised-i-was-surpris)/2441080836110624/
When we pray…

When Women Speak… Webzine
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sweet Arabic coffee together, and talked over the affairs of the building and the day, her
two-year old son pulled out her prayer mat and tried to don the skirt and top himself, in a
play imitation of what he saw his mother do so often as she knelt on her prayer mat.

Wensinck (1974: 495) describes Muhammad performing salah with Zainab’s little
daughter hanging around his neck, and on another occasion Muhammad’s grandsons
Hasan and Hussein jumping on his back as he prostrated. Wensinck suggests that
Muslim jurisprudence since then has ruled that such antics invalidate the salah.
However Muhammad’s example can be seen repeatedly re-enacted as women do salah
at home or in the women’s section in the mosque, and their children climb and tumble
over them as they pray.

Mothers have a key part in children’s religious formation, as the primary models
of faith for children in their earliest years. They have a crucial role as purveyors of
faith to the next generation.

_Dhikr and Du’a’ – Prayers of Recollection and Petition_

Beyond salah, this paper gives attention to women involved in dhikr (recollection
through meditation and recitation) and du’a’ (supplication or petition). Not part of the
five pillars of Islam, these are not subject to the same restrictions. Reliant on the
initiative of the worshipper and encouragement of the community, these forms of
worship offer us a more extended appreciation of Muslim devotional theology – how
the worshipper understands her access, through faith community and faith practice,
to her Creator.

Recollection (dhikr) and petition (du’a’) are distinct practices, but without
distinct boundaries. In practice there is often movement back and forth, from dhikr
on the names of God, to du’a’ and back to dhikr. The three forms, including salah,
are not independent of one another. A Muslim woman described it for me:
It’s not a condition if I do dhikr, to then petition (du’ā), nor if I petition to do dhikr, or if I pray (salah), to petition; but we need to complete the dhikr by petition (du’ā). When a person has asked God’s forgiveness and has become clean within and pure before God, then the petition, if God wills, will be answered more.

**Dhikr : Recollection**

Women are sitting in silent concentration in an upper room of the mosque. It is quiet, just the sound of their lips moving in time with the prayer beads, and someone’s periodic murmur. A few of the women are rocking, some passing the prayer beads through their fingers. There is slight movement as women adjust their position: one woman takes off her coat. The noises of cars, voices, come in from outside. Inside the women are quiet, still, concentrating. The girl beside me is crying. She swallows, continues to pass the prayer beads through her fingers. A low voice begins to recite something, and others join in quietly for a little while. Then there is silence again, with only the muted sound of voices whispering to themselves, lips moving. A woman in the front row begins to sing quietly, a song of worship. “I knew you, O Lord, in my heart and my thoughts.” She sings this a few times, and some other phrases. Others sit silently, some moving their lips, some rocking their bodies a little.

The dhikr prayers are taken from the Qur’an, Hadith and other sources to centre the extended awareness of the worshipper on God. Recited or sung, accompanied by movement or quiet sitting, they draw the reciter to reflect on God's names and nature. The popularly chosen chants may serve as an indication of how those praying them look to God, the aspects of God’s nature that they focus on as most significant. They express the direction or longing of the worshippers’ hearts towards God. For many
Muslims the *dhikr* occupies a major part in their religious life. A mosque teacher told me:

> The only thing that God has prescribed for us to do all the time is the *dhikr*.  
> ... ‘Remember God with many remembrances’ (*Surah Al-Ahzab*, 33:41). ....  
> *Salah* is five times and Pilgrimage once a year and Fasting once a year. But the *dhikr* is frequent and so the *dhikr* is very important in our lives.  

Women in that women’s mosque programme were encouraged to do *dhikr* at home, and also join in corporate sessions at the mosque. For the leaders, *dhikr* was an important prelude to the lessons. The teacher told the women: “The lesson without the *dhikr* is about a quarter of its usefulness. The *dhikr* is the spiritual preparation and gives us concentration, so we don’t miss half the lecture.”

As a mystical practice outside the five pillars, *dhikr* has always had its critics within Islam. *Dhikr* and the use of prayer beads are opposed by some Muslims as an innovation, and therefore heretical.

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8 The imperative to constant recollection is reminiscent of the Pauline enjoinder to “pray at all times.” 1 Thess 5:17, Eph 6:18

9 One writer comments poignantly that: “Salafis” accuse us of deviation and heresy because we sit and recite *dhikr* - loud or silently ... Some of them object because it is loud and they claim it should be silent; others object because it is silent and they claim it should be loud; others object because it is in a group and it should be individual; others because they claim our emphasis on *dhikr* is excessive and we should raise funds or study or hold conferences or make jihad instead; others object because some people are affected by the *dhikr* so as to sway or move this way or that instead of sitting still, so they want everyone to sit absolutely still; others because we sometimes perform *dhikr* in dim surroundings rather than in a glaring light; others yet object to reciting the name ALLAH by itself and claim it is an innovation, so that we should only say: YA Allah. Finally, they also accuse us of innovation and misguidance because we use *dhikr*-beads which we carry in our hands.” [http://sunnah.org/ibadaat/dhikrtable.htm](http://sunnah.org/ibadaat/dhikrtable.htm)
But those who practise *dhikr* point back to Muhammad meditating in a cave, and to Qu’ranic verses.\(^\text{10}\) The most quoted verse is *Al-Baqarah* 2:152 with its promise: “So remember Me, I will remember you”. Padwick (1961:16) notes on this verse: “In all the devotional comments and prayers based on the promise, the meaning hovers between ‘remembrance’ and ‘mention.’”

![Figure 1: Prayer beads and counters for sale](image)

_Dhikr_ can be quiet sessions like that described above: in other places it can involve greater noise and activity, people standing, swaying more violently, or walking around in a circle. Prayer beads are characteristic, used to tally the number of recitations. Women murmur invocations of _dhikr_ as they pass the prayer beads through their fingers, slowly or quickly. Other ways of counting (usually in multiples of eleven) are

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10 Some verses refer to the coming of Gabriel (*An-Najm* 53:1-18; *At-Takwir* 81:19-25) and Muhammad’s night journey (*Al-Kahf* 17:1). Other verses suggest a mystical consciousness of God (*Al-Baqarah* 2:115, 186; *Al-Taubah* 9:123; *Al-‘Ankabut* 29:20; *Qaf* 50:16), and especially the famous verse of light (*Al-Nur* 24:35). The word _dhikr_ appears often in the Qur’an (such as *Al-Ma’idah* 5:91; *Al-Jum’ah* 62:9; *Al-‘A’la* 87:15, and more particularly *Al-Baqarah* 2:200; *Al-‘imran* 5:41; *Al-A’raf* 7:205; *Al-Muzzammil* 72:17).
include mechanical counters, or counting off on finger joints, or using beans. Rhythmic movement helps focus, whether swaying, whirling, or quietly passing prayer beads through fingers.

Silence & Song

_Dhikr_ may be verbal, with the tongue (_dhikr lisani_); or silent,\(^{11}\) in the heart (_dhikr qalbi_). Verbal _dhikr_ includes songs, with the lyrics and rhythm often composed by the instructor or one of the women in the programme. Some are extended songs (_tarnim_) by the leader of the _dhikr_, sometimes with women joining in the chorus. These are times when leaders can show their skill in singing, and the songs may be characterized by more extended passages and less repetition. An excerpt from one song includes:

- I pray, whispering, praying. I rise in the night before dawn.
- I pray, whispering, praying, with tears. Whatever I face in this life,
- The small problems – I am busy with you, apart from what my eyes see.
- Bitterness becomes sweet if You are satisfied.
- Who is for me apart from You? And who apart from You sees and teaches my heart?
- All creatures are shadows.
- I cry to you, O Lord, I cry to you, O Lord. Forgive my small sins in your generosity.
- Make my good thoughts intercessions.
- Hearer and Knower of all my situation, Answerer of all questions

\(^{11}\) Silent _dhikr_ is particularly, although not exclusively, linked with the Naqshabandi order.
Let your favour change my situation
There is no strength but by You. Be gentle and have mercy on my situation.
Forgive my small sins and pardon.
Life is pure if you are satisfied, from every fear of destination.
So take away from me all of life's crises
O Hearer and Knower of all my situation, O Answerer of all questions.

Another form of songs (anashid) is a lively chant led by a group, accompanied by a drum, usually on days of special remembrance or feasts. For both tarnim and anashid, alliteration, rhythm and rhyme are important. Women’s voices may be considered awrah (shameful) and forbidden in some contexts; however in dhikr women’s talent in singing is taken up and honoured.

Words of recollection
What is prayed in the dhikr? Unlike the set salah, the individual has more freedom of choice here. The act of recollection is important, rather than the specific words to achieve it. The mosque teacher described it:

Perhaps all the dhikr could be, the Name of God, God only; if we say, O Patient One, O Generous One, O Forgiving One, O Merciful One, Praised be God,
There is no god but God, God is greater, There is no changing or strength except in God - any formula is acceptable. What’s important is that we remember God and his greatness and his creation and his characteristics.

Whether repeated phrases, or actual songs or choruses, dhikr draws deeply on the formative affect of music, with rhyme and rhythm, on people’s minds and lives.
Dhikr is also closely linked with the phrases and sentiments of salah (formal) daily prayer.\textsuperscript{12}

**Refuge and Forgiveness**

The dhikr times I attended most commonly began with taking refuge, and invoking the name of God:

I take refuge in God, the Hearing, the Knowing, from the accursed devil.

In the Name of God the Compassionate the Merciful.

‘Taking refuge’ is also at the start of salah. It finds Qur'anic authority in *Al-Nahl* Q16:98: “and when you recite the Qur'an seek refuge with God from Satan the accursed.” (Also *Al-Falaq* Q113:1 and *Al-Nas* Q114:1, the two frequently-quoted final chapters of the Qur'an.) Together with the invocation of God's name, it is a protective prayer in the context of the uncertainties of daily life (whether in health, education and employment, communal relationships or wider politics) and in the face of surrounding spiritual forces and the impact of the evil eye. While the Qur'an generally seeks refuge from external danger of the devil or people, the women in that mosque programme linked it often to their felt need for forgiveness from God:

I take refuge in You from the evil I have done, and I come to You in Your grace to me, and I come to you in my sin, so forgive me, for there is no one who forgives sins except You.

\textsuperscript{12} For a more detailed discussion, see Dale 2016, pp.180-201.
This longing for forgiveness recurred in the constantly heard “God, forgive!” *istaghfir Allah*, and a number of other common invocations, such as this one which links with the title of God as most Merciful:

> There is no god but You, praise You. I was among the wrong-doers, and You are the most Merciful of the merciful.”

In this view, the ‘wrongdoers’ or sinful are those who wrong themselves in sinning – sin is against the sinner, not against God. Humanity (created weak by God) tends by nature to sin, while God’s nature is to mercy. God’s sovereignty excludes any necessity to forgive. However it is easy for Him in his omnipotence to forgive: because He has not been sinned against, it does not cost Him. In the transaction between Forgiver and forgiven, there is no obligation to forgive, nor any cost in forgiveness.

**Blessing us, and blessing Muhammad**

God is praised for His unique greatness with chanted phrases, whether short such as:

> “There is no god but You, may You be praised,”

or more extended invocations. His attributes are also recited and repeated, perhaps to affirm the reciters’ faith or to invoke God’s help. Attributes I often heard were those that reflected the worshippers’ needs: including Healer, Giver, Defender, Forgiver, the One who relieves troubles, who offers help, orders affairs, hears our voices and answers petitions.

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13 *Al-Nisa* 4:28
14 Nor does receiving forgiveness from God entail any requirement to forgive others.
God is sovereign and bestows forgiveness, and other blessings such as protection, healing and provision of needs, as He wills. On the recipients’ side, they place themselves in position to receive through pious practices, including the use of prescribed invocations, often at particular times of the day, or for a set number of repetitions.

_Dhikr_ sessions also involved asking God’s blessing on Muhammad, reflecting the belief that God will bless those who call down blessing on Muhammad, such as:

Prayers and peace be with you, O lord, O messenger of God
or
Prayers and peace with our lord Muhammad and on his family and friends.

Muhammad might be invoked with titles such as ‘Beloved of God,’ ‘Advocate’ and ‘Healer of hearts.’

**Emotion**

_Dhikr_ is also associated with emotional expression. The preferred leader of group prayer is often the one whose voice in leading is most likely to elicit emotion and tears among those in the group. When I attended the early morning Ramadan prayer in a Middle Eastern mosque, at 2-3a.m. the mosque was tightly packed with 5-700 women in the upper section and many more men below, crying ‘Amin’ after each _du ’a_’ with rising emotional intensity. Spontaneous tears are expected as a normal part of prayer, and this is facilitated by the communal experience of worship.

Through the recited _dhikr_ we may gain a sense of the “pulsing life of religion,” the heart-desire of those who pray. _Dhikr_ prayers show Muslim women’s yearning for a God who will offer refuge and safety in the precariousness of their lives, and also their felt need for Divine forgiveness. _Dhikr_ prayers express hope that God will offer
healing, protection, beneficence, hearing and answering their prayers. The exalted titles and prayer for Muhammad evince their desire for him to act as their effective intercessor with God. Dhikr is linked with du ‘a’ because the worshipper needs to evoke God’s forgiveness before He will hear their petition. Through transactional faith practice of dhikr and other pious duties, Muslim women seek God’s intervention in daily life.

\[\text{دعاء – Du’a: Supplication}\]

The women have been involved in dhikr. Now there is a small shifting of women in position, leaning forward slightly, hands together, palms up. The sheikha leads in the du’a’. There are about five minutes of petition for Muslims throughout the world, for our sisters in Iraq, in Palestine. She asks God to heal us, our land, our society. Don’t cut us off from your service. God, purify us from our sins and trespasses. The women join in with ‘Amin’ after each petition. The sheikha finishes by saying, “The Fatiha,” and the women murmur it quietly with her. At the end a number of them wipe their faces with their hands, bringing the blessing (baraka) of the recited words back on themselves.

The du’a’ supplications express the worshipper’s desires for God’s intervention in the happenings of the world, both individual and among the corporate Muslim umma. As du’a’ is prayed in the community, it indicates something of the way these women see their place in the wider community, and how they hold onto the sovereignty of God and His purpose for his people alongside what is happening in the world.

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\[\text{15 The first chapter of the Qur’an: its recitation seals or sanctifies occasions.}\]
Content

(Petition for me! (Ida ‘ili) is a common part of interaction among devout Muslim women, as it is among Christians, who say, “Pray for me (Salili),” reflecting the wider use of the term salah among the Arabic-speaking Christian population. Women at the mosque would often ask me to petition for them, or say, “Petition (God) for me, and I petition for you.” It can mean a general petition for well-being; or frequently among young women, for success in studies or family.

Du ‘a’ is universal across the Muslim world, but there is surprisingly little on it in writings about Islam. Incorporated into the formal salah (liturgical prayer), du ‘a’ finds its way also into every part of life. It is not as bounded by rules of purity and language as salah, not as controversial as dhikr (repetitive prayer). It includes invocations for rewards in the next life, but is perhaps even more important for seeking power and protection for the needs of this life. Hence it has an important place in the lives and practices of Muslim women, who must find a way to access divine power to fulfill their responsibilities for family harmony and welfare, amid the restrictions of bodily purity which are so weighted against women. Written, recited or spontaneously uttered, du ‘a’ voices the piety and deep desires of women and men across the Muslim world.

Power: Conditions of efficacy

In du ‘a’ the hands are not busy with prayer beads, but most typically held together, palms up, in a supplicant position. Women may stand or sit, according to the position they have been in. Du ‘a’ can take place anywhere, on any occasion, and everyone can do it. While it can happen anywhere, some conditions make du ‘a’ more effective, more likely to elicit a favourable divine response. I was told:

When we pray...
“Petition, when the person has done the ablutions and is sitting facing the direction of the qibla, of course is received more than from an inattentive person who is watching the television and says, ‘O Lord, give me...’.”

These conditions include where and when the duʿaʾ is prayed. I have seen women and also men gathering at shrines from Syria to Sumatra, murmuring prayers from the booklets that are usually in a small pile for the visitor seeking extra efficacy or baraka (blessing) from the holy person buried there. A Muslim teacher told me of her father standing at the Kaʿba at Mecca as he prayed that his children would become teachers of Islam. In addition to places, there are particular times of power. The Night of Power near the end of the month of Ramadan is well known as a night when petitions are answered. As I sat beside the teacher at the mosque on that evening, she told me to petition for my family, petition for my children. Mornings (daybreak) and evenings are often quoted as times to recite prayers, often a set number of repetitions (three times in the evening, or ten or a hundred times in the morning and in the evening; or thirty-three times and thirty-four for the culminating invocation). Particular days or months may have their associated invocations and attendant rewards. I visited the mosque teacher one day soon after her husband and daughter had returned from making the lesser pilgrimage\(^\text{16}\) to Mecca. The teacher offered us water from the spring of Zamzam, served in small golden cups, instructing us to say a petition when we drank it, because God would answer it.

\(^{16}\) The ’Umra (عمرة) – a pilgrimage to Mecca that doesn’t take place at the time of the official Hajj.
While *du’ā’* can be in any language, use of Arabic is believed to enhance its effectiveness. Booklets and cards of *du’ā’* will often include the Arabic with its translation and sometimes transliteration for the non-Arabic speaker. Actions may also contribute. One prayer is to be ‘read three times when you lie down, placing your right hand under your right cheek’ (Al-Husaynaan, 2006:134). *Du’ā’* is most often said with hands spread out, palms up, or cupped, to receive blessing: and the hands are often wiped over the worshipper’s face at the end, as a physical application of blessing. The prayer for rain (*salat al-īstisqa’*) - usually part of public prayer) may be performed with raised hands and the outer garments of the petitioners turned inside out, following the example of Muhammad, Prophet of Islam.

*Du’ā’* are generally related to particular situations, more often than for specific needs. Thus invocations are prescribed for an extensive category of occasions such as entering and leaving the bathroom, putting on new clothes or undressing, when it thunders, or the new moon is sighted, when travelling, when you hear a dog bark, or when you see the first dates of the new season.

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17 About 20% of Muslims speak Arabic as their mother tongue.
Taking refuge

Widespread use is made also in *du ‘a’* of ‘taking refuge’ from lurking dangers encountered.\(^\text{18}\) It occurs frequently in the books of recommended *du ‘a’*, as well as the exclamation of the ordinary person in the street who has a fright. Padwick describes it as the 'cry of frightened humanity' ... 'in a demon-haunted world, in a world ... where the evil eye is to be feared as well as the attacks of less uncanny human enemies' (1961:97). Some of the perils from which the worshipper seeks refuge in God include: 'the evil of the whisperer who withdraws,' 'the evil of today and the days after it, laziness and old age, the punishment of hellfire and the grave' and similarly, 'the grave and its torture,' 'the evil of my soul and the evil of the devil and his helpers,' and 'the evil of the created world' (Al-Qahtani 1996). Other times to take refuge are at the

Conclusion of *salah* (as well as its beginning), going into the mosque, in the evening, before going to sleep (Al-Husaynaan 2006).

**Longings of everyday life**

*Du’a* can go also beyond formal phrases, repetitions, and conditions of purity and pious practice, to express the inner hopes of the petitioner, whether in Arabic, another language, or the most inarticulate expressions of heart longing. In this, as well as all the varied contexts in which it is prescribed, *du’a* recognises the possibility of God who is present to, and who may intervene in, every part of our lives as we seek Him.

**Du ‘a’ and Dhikr in the Mosque**

Private petitions at home were more personal: in the mosque petitions were more of public concerns. ‘Our sisters in Palestine and Iraq’ were often mentioned in times of *du’a*. Sometimes there was a clear connection to the content of the petitions. At other times more general invocations of praise or supplication were used, presumably said with intent for the women mentioned. Here again the boundaries between recollection and supplication were fairly fluid.

In the following example, general *dhikr* invocations are used with specific ‘intent’ or focus:

The leader says, “Sisters, we’re going to have special prayer for our sisters in Palestine and Iraq.”

She starts and the women join in:

O Living and Eternal One, in your mercy we seek your help.

The phrase is repeated a number of times, followed by other phrases such as:

O God, help us, O Helper of those who call for help.

God

There is no god but You, praise to You. For I was among the unjust, and You are

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**When we pray...**

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the most merciful of the merciful.
O most Merciful of the merciful, have mercy on us.
O God, to you is our petition.
For we have not depended (on anyone) other than You
O God, requite for us our master Muhammad the Apostle of God
Be pleased with us and purify our hearts
Your love, O God, purifies our hearts. Who is equal to you or makes beloved like you?
Praise to God, Lord of all that exists

In these petitions, God is named as Living, Eternal, Merciful, to be Praised. Sometimes His characteristics are doubly invoked, perhaps as if to add spiritual force even as the meaning is intensified grammatically by doubling: He is Helper of those who call for help, Most Merciful of the merciful; and appealed to: If You don’t give, who will give? and No one pardons except You.

The time of dhikr and du ’a’ is usually concluded by reciting the Fatiha. Some (often older) women may wipe their faces when they have murmured the Fatiha or another phrase of invocation into their open hands.

The act of reciting the characteristics of God enables the worshipper both to face her context with confidence that God will act, and at the same time is seen as a means of bringing God’s blessing or power to bear on the situation through the act of invocation. The blessing (baraka) released through dhikr is effective for healing, forgiveness of sins, success in business ventures. Thus the recollection (dhikr) enables the object of the supplication (du ’a’).

Enactment of salah and the rest of five pillars entails punishment if they are
neglected, and recompense, or merits received, if they are performed satisfactorily. Thus (while some of the pillars such as the pilgrimage are believed to bestow forgiveness of sins) through the allocation of merits, they form a primary part of Divine accounting towards the afterlife and entry into paradise. But it is through popular devotion in dhikr and du’a’ that people are able to access divine power now in their daily lives – both in gaining strength to cope through the affirmation of God’s sovereignty and mercy, and also in more direct power for healing, blessing and success. Doumato (2000:38) notes:

Wherever women are marginalized in the orthodox tradition and barred from the sacred precincts, their spiritual needs and their need for community are channelled into ritual performances they can do, and what they can do is often done in response to needs in their personal lives.”

Women, through these forms of devotion, can gain access to God at any time, untrammelled by the restrictions of purity and dress attached to the required forms of salah. For both recollection and supplication, while the conventions of purity and dress are preferable, they are not necessary. For dhikr, “the ablutions are preferred. It’s not prescribed, but it’s preferable to be clean, having done ablutions.” But these forms of worship are possible for women at any time. “The menstruating woman can do dhikr, can make supplications (du’a’).” Similarly the rules of dress are less binding: a woman can remove her coat if the mosque room is hot, during the dhikr, but she dons it again to join in the salah. In salah set words are prescribed: in dhikr and du’a’ at the mosque there are commonly-used phrases learned and repeated, but the worshipper’s expression is not limited only to these. The mosque teacher explained that someone doing dhikr at home “can feel more reverence by himself, and is able to say what he
wants and supplicate (du’a’) as he pleases, if he wants to call out or cry out, or whatever is appropriate with God according to his situation, he can do so.” So dhikr and du’a’ enable women, whatever their context of ritual purity, to access God’s power and blessing for their daily family needs.

**Emotions**

However these practices are not only mechanical means of accessing Divine blessing for life. People can be deeply emotionally engaged. A young woman told me about her experience in the Night of Vigil of Ramadan. She explained how people attend the tarawih (Ramadan evening) prayers,

“...and then there is ‘staying up in the night’. They end with prayers an hour before sunrise - about 3-4.30 a.m. It is about reverence and tears. God comes down to the first heaven and answers prayers. It’s solitude, you and God alone. You feel as if you’re flying, pray until tears come, it’s a strange feeling, tears come suddenly. You pray to God, feel with everyone, love everyone, feel soft, forget your worries; and what I feel at night, I try to follow in the day, as I am able.”

I commonly see people weeping quietly, or murmuring ‘O Lord’ with a choked voice, sniffing, during both dhikr and du’a’. This is especially but not exclusively, so during Ramadan; and television coverage of the Pilgrimage shows crowds, both men and women, in tears during the times of corporate worship. A friend explained the benefit of tears in terms of a cleansing or cathartic effect. She preferred to go to a particular mosque for the suhur prayers (between midnight and the pre-dawn meal) during Ramadan, where the sheikh was especially popular because of how effective his voice was in eliciting an emotive response in the respondents.
Conclusion

Generally in the Muslim world men occupy the official religious space. They have primacy of space in the mosque; they stand in the minbars of the mosques; they officiate at religious and legal ceremonies, teach the meaning of the sacred writings, and pass on the official interpretations of faith and religious life. But women are in a different place. Encouraged to pray salah at home, they are also immersed in all the grounded, messy parts of daily life, carrying out the duties that can make one unclean and not able to participate in the mandated religious activities, responsible to keep ordinary family life going at all the times of crisis or passage. It is women who are involved at all the rites of passage that ensure the continuation of life patterns from inception to end. So, beyond personal piety, they use dhikr and du ’a’ to bring blessing into the domains of life where as women they carry particular responsibility – family needs, daily health, rites of passage.

Taken together, the analysis of these different forms of devotion, as practiced in the women’s programme in a Middle Eastern Sunni mosque, give us a richer picture of the devotional life of Muslim women: and a more adequate base for engagement. We can ask, what is the place of these forms of prayer in the lives of the Muslim women to whom we are relating? How do the requirements of purity and modesty shape their religious practice? What is the place of emotion in their devotion? What are the forces, internal or external, from which they take refuge? What examples or narratives in the Bible connect with these forms of prayer, with these expressions, constraints or heart-longings? And how can this guide our conversations about the One who sends the Holy Spirit to pray within our own hearts, giving voice even to the inarticulate thoughts and longings that are too deep to express.
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When we pray...

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Salah
Through the upstairs hall, the women’s section of a Middle Eastern mosque, comes the sound of a youthful male voice sounding the call to prayer. Women in the hall rise and walk through to the balcony, form quickly into ranks and wait silently. Numbers of women appear now from inside rooms off the hall - the last few pass through almost at a run. No curtain offers a barrier here between the balcony and the men’s space below: there is just a railing.

(God is great) - and they bend at the waist.
Rise, kneel and bow their head to the ground, sit up, bow, sit up.
Stand, bend, rise, kneel and bow, sit up, bow, sit up.
The voice croons the سلام عليكم ورحمة الله (Peace and the mercy of God be with you) and the kneeling women look to their right and left shoulders.

Salah/ namuz is the basis of Muslim worship. Ordained by Muhammad, Prophet of Islam, most people are familiar with the picture of Muslims standing, bowing, prostrating together in rhythmic lines, or the solitary worshipper making office or sidewalk into a place of prayer. Salah consists of set actions and words, explained below. However it is far more than physical actions and phrases. The practice of salah embeds the consciousness of Muslim identity and community belonging deep into the minds and bodies of Muslims.
The Aramaic root *s-l-‘* means ‘to bow, to bend, to stretch.’ Muslim *salah* has similarities to Jewish and Christian ritual prayer.\textsuperscript{19} In Islam ritual prayer demands the precondition of physical purity.

\textbf{A. Salah: Deeds and Words}

\textbf{Washing}

*Salah* prayer is preceded by ablutions: the worshipper needs to come pure in body. Substances passing body boundaries (solid, liquid or gas), vomiting, falling asleep, or taking any intoxicating substance, since the last washing, all require the performance of *wudu*.

\begin{quote}
The intention of the heart: Say: “I intend purity from this pure water.” Then say, “In the Name of God the Compassionate the Merciful.”

Wash your two palms up to the wrists three times.
Rinse out your mouth three times with your right hand.
Inhale water three times then clear your nose with your left hand.
Wash your face completely three times, from your hair roots to the bottom of your chin and from ear to ear.
Wash your hands to the elbows three times.
Wipe your head with your hand.
And with any water remaining in your hand from your head wipe, wipe your ears. Take care to clean the ridges of your ears inside and out with your fingers.
Wash your feet and soles three times.
And after washing, say: *I testify that there is no god but God and I testify that Mohammad is the Messenger of God.*
\end{quote}

Figure 1: The steps of *wudu* (Translated from a Ramadan poster prayer guide for children in the Middle East)

Cartoon posters help children learn the steps of cleansing and may also serve as reminders for elderly or those afflicted with dementia, lest their prayer be invalidated by neglecting some of the actions.

Ghusl (complete bathing) is required after sexual intercourse, discharge from the sexual organs, completing menstruation, or completing the period after giving birth (up to forty days), before being able to perform salah.

For those unable to use water, tayammum (dry ablution), cleansing with pure earth is permitted.21

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The basic rules of washing have been codified by Muslim scholars into complex rules of permitted purity of water including who or what has touched the water and if it is running or still. What breaks purity, and how to restore it, is a major preoccupation within *fiqh* (jurisprudence).

**Hours of salah**

The times of *salah* divide the daylight hours, stretching and contracting with the seasons, marking the passage of daylight with the muezzin call in Muslim countries. Creation rather than clock defines times of *salah*; defined by the position of the sun, *salah* times move with diurnal rhythm through the more settled hours of the clock face. The *sheikha* of a women’s programme in a Middle Eastern mosque, explained the intervals to me:

Dawn prayer (*الفجر* *fajr*) - starts when the sun begins to rise, about an hour and a half before the sun is risen, when the time of dawn prayer then finishes.

Midday prayer (*الظهر* *dhuhur*) – takes place at midday.

Mid-afternoon prayer (*الغروب* *asr*) – is about 2 ½ hours after midday prayers, when a shadow is about twice the length of the object, and it lasts until sunset.

Sunset prayer (*المغرب* *maghrib*) – extends from the going down of the sun, and lasts as long as there is still a red glow or red line in the sky

Evening prayer (*العشاء* ‘*asha*’) – is when the sun has completely gone.

Now poetic descriptions of nature have turned into “electronic devices and special clocks … which can tell the prayer times of many of the major cities in the world”.  

22 A board in the main body of the mosque showed the date, time and times of

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prayer, which changed daily, in red electronic writing. On a mid-December (winter) day it recorded the times as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dawn:</td>
<td>4-56 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunrise:</td>
<td>6-30 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midday:</td>
<td>11-31 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afternoon:</td>
<td>2-11 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunset:</td>
<td>4-32 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening:</td>
<td>5-35 pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Example of prayer times on a winter day.

Under pressure of time, travel or hardship the midday and afternoon, or sunset and evening prayers may be combined or shortened. And the call to prayer defines the acceptable time spaces for prayer. No prayer can be prayed before its time and no prayer can be prayed once the call has sounded for the prayer time that comes after it.

Extra times: As well as the compulsory five times, the worshipper is offered two optional extra times: mid-morning (صلاة الضحى) and late at night, into the early morning hours (صلاة الليل).

23 Saqib allows the combination of prayers for someone on a journey (1997: 62, 63). When travelling more than 55 miles it is also sunnah to shorten midday, afternoon and evening prayers to 2 rak’a, based on a number of hadith and Q Surah al-Nisa’ 4:101-104. https://myislam.org/shortening-the-salah-while-travelling/ However some of our colleagues in time-pressured jobs combine prayers in this way. Philips also suggests this combination of prayers for a woman who has prolonged bleeding which prevents her praying, quoting a Hadith from Sunan Abud Dawud, vol. 1, p.74, no. 294 and authenticated in Saheeh Sunan Abee Daawood, vol. 1, p. 59, no. 281, and 282 (1995, p.41).

24 Except the two permissible combinations described in the preceding note.
**Rite of salah**

Having purified themselves, the worshipper is able to perform the set words and actions that constitute *salah*. There is variation within *salah* in the Qur’anic chapters and the *du’a* (petitions) that can be recited.

The prayer space is marked off by a prayer mat, or *sutra* (literally, ‘shelter’), an object that the pray-er places in front of them to mark the direction (towards Mecca) and space of prayer.

**Beginning**

**Standing**

- Softly say, or say in one’s heart the *niyya* (intention to pray): then

**Hands raised**

- *Takbir*: *Allahu akbar* ‘God is greatest’

**Hands folded in front of the body**

- Recommended petition for purification from sin
- ‘I seek refuge with God from Satan the accursed’
- Reciting the *Fatihah* (first chapter of the Qur’an)
- Reciting another *surah Ikhlas* [112] or *Falaq* [113] or *Nas* [114] are often used

**One rak’a**

**Standing**

- *Takbir*

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25 In Shi’a Islam, hands are left hanging at the side of the body.
Bowing
- ‘Praise to my Lord, the Almighty’ and other recommended *du’a* (petitions)

Standing
- ‘God listens to the one who praises him’

Hands raised
- More recommended *du’a* of praise
- Takbir

Kneeling, with head to the ground
- ‘Praise to my Lord, the Exalted’ and more recommended *du’a*

Sitting
- Takbir and recommended *du’a*

Kneeling, with head to the ground
- ‘Praise to my Lord, the Exalted’

Sitting
- Takbir

This is repeated for the mandated number of *rak’a* (two, three or four). The successive *rak’a* finish with:
- ‘All greetings, prayers and good deeds are due to God. Peace on you, oh Prophet, and God’s mercy and blessings be on you. Peace be on us and on the righteous worshippers of God. I testify that there is no god but God, and I bear witness that Muhammad is his slave and Messenger.’

**Conclusion**

After the last *rak’a*:
• ‘Oh God, send your mercy on Muhammad and on his family as you sent your mercy on Abraham and on his family. You are most praised and most glorious.

• Oh God, bless Muhammad and his family, as you blessed Abraham and his family. You are most praised and most glorious.’

Followed by recommended *du’a*.

• ‘Peace be on you, and the mercy of God’, said twice as the pray-er turns her face to the right and then the left shoulder.

The pray-er can continue with as much private *du’a* as they want to.
Within the five prayer times there are gradations of duty and devotion, in the number of rak’a prayed. This is how a leader in a ME women’s mosque programme described the differences for me. The most basic level is the prescribed fard (الفرض) prayer. “We...
need to pray it, and if we don’t pray it we are punished.” There is also strong incentive for the devout to pray the traditional non-obligatory sunnah (السنة) prayers: “we receive wages and benefaction if we pray it,” and also “because it was commanded by the Prophet, and if we love the Prophet I will listen to his words.” As sunnah, the number of these rak’a are also specified (see Figure 5 below). Most devout women of my acquaintance will pray these sunnah prayers when there is no time pressure on them to finish the salah quickly. And finally, there is the extra, or additional nafilah (الناقلاة) optional rak’a, which carries no set reward or penalty beyond that of devotion: “This is drawing closer to God. If we don’t pray it, there’s no penalty.” ... “We pray it when we’re tense or upset and we should pray it in the preferred days, in Ramadan. And the benefit of this prayer is drawing closer to God.” Saqib adds, “Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) encouraged the believers to pray Nafl to help make up for any minor omissions or other defects in the obligatory prayer.” This extra nafilah prayer generally has no fixed number of rak’a attached to it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prayer</th>
<th>Sunrise</th>
<th>Midday</th>
<th>Afternoon</th>
<th>Sunset</th>
<th>Evening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obligatory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>مصلالا / fard</td>
<td>2 2</td>
<td>4 4</td>
<td>4 3</td>
<td>4 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommended</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>السنة / sunnah</td>
<td>2 before</td>
<td>2 or 4 before, 2 afterwards</td>
<td>2 or 4 before, 2 afterwards</td>
<td>2 afterwards</td>
<td>2 afterwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>الناقلاة / nafilah</td>
<td>Generally unspecified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: Obligatory, recommended and optional numbers of rak’a in salah.

While the times, actions and words of salah are mandated in detail, there is still room for movement and variation in its performance. However, a focus just on the mechanics of salah can overlook the significance of how it functions in personal and communal formation.

B. Salah: Corporeal and Corporate

Communal prayer

Bodily posture

The movements of salah are also a way of training both the body and internal attitudes. The posture of bowing and prostrating is a physical expression of the internal attitude of khashu’ (خشوع), submissiveness and humility. Constance Padwick quotes an unnamed writer on the actions of salah in The Light, Lahore:

> It is not a mechanical drill, but the various postures of humility in salat indicate complete external of bodily submission to God which conforms with the spiritual submission, and this is a necessity since man has a body as well as a soul which exercise great influence on each other through their movements. The submissive movements of the body in this prayer produce equivalent submissive movements in the soul.\(^{28}\)

Bowing and prostrating are postures that may be instinctively adopted by someone of any background who is pouring out their heart to God with its cares and sorrows. Muslim apologists would point to that as evidence of fitrah (فطرة) – our innate

nature and tendency to worship. Repeated bodily posture reinforces the inner attitude of humility before God. One MBB was encouraged by discovering the Jewish and Christian history of prostration and more physical forms of prayer, since to him bowing before God was so reflexive, rather than particularly Islamic. New MBBs often expect to receive instruction on how to pray in the Christian faith and many feel perplexed by the lack of structure and the physical inactivity. Physical and non-verbal communication are an integral part of communication in so-called ‘high context’ cultures, including Arab, Asian and African nations while ‘low context’ cultures including Western Europe, Australia and North America focus on word-based communication.  

For women in particular, wearing prayer clothes (covering all the body except face and hands) promotes the attitude of haya’ (払い), modesty or shyness. For many young women, wearing prayer clothes is their first experience of wearing hijab (حجاب), the veil or head covering. Girls, especially when going to the mosque, may behave in a way that is more demure and shy: and they receive positive reinforcement by family about how pretty and peaceful they look with their hijab. Mahmood comments on how the act of wearing the veil serves as “the ineluctable means by which one trains oneself to be pious. While wearing the veil serves at first as a means to tutor oneself in the attribute of shyness, it is also simultaneously integral to the practice of shyness.”

29 The Silent Language by Andrew T. Hall, 1959
In a culture where non-verbal communication and actions are so important, actions and attire can crucially signal heart commitments. They can also indicate community allegiance.

**Part of the community**

The daily *salah* prayer inscribes into the bodies and days of Muslims both mindfulness of God, and even more strongly, mindfulness of the community to which they belong. That communal aspect is powerfully and physically embodied at the mosque as men join in rows, foot to foot, shoulder to shoulder, bowing, kneeling and standing again together as one. An MBB who enjoys fellowship at church commented that although he believes in the deep bond of being one body in Christ, nevertheless in a church service he does not experience the same force of community and unification of the gathered *jum’ah* (جمعه) prayers. The united community of (male) prayer is the physical manifestation of the teaching of *ummah* (community), brotherhood and unity in Islam – shoulder to shoulder, foot to foot, falling, rising, bowing and intoning in unison.

Participating in the *ummah* directly impacts their standing with God, with 27 times more reward for praying corporately than if an individual prays alone. While men are told to pray at the mosque, women are often encouraged to pray at home: on their own, or in a small gathering of two or three other women or perhaps with a male in the household standing in front to lead the prayer. However increasingly around the world women are going to the mosque for teaching and joining together there in prayer. A Muslim woman in Germany described how:

31 Sahih Bukhari 645, Book 10, Hadith 42
attending Friday prayers each week lifted her mood. There was the intimacy of her sleeve being tugged as the women lined up in tight rows of prayer; the feeling that, for even just that quarter of an hour, there was one specific spot designated for her; within the collective of women kneeling down in unison, as one body, submitting to God.\textsuperscript{32}

Even for women praying at home, or those women or men praying in their places of work or offices, doing \textit{salah} joins them together with the \textit{ummah} of Muslims worldwide in praying. They recite the set prayers in the one language (Arabic). Together they face a particular direction (towards Mecca). They join in the prescribed body postures of standing, bowing, kneeling, prostrating. Body posture gives physical rhythm to the words of prayer. The times of prayer give their cadence to the daylight hours, expanding and contracting over the seasons with the period between sunrise and sunset each day. Acting together in time, in orientation of space, in the movement of their bodies, in a common language, the patterns of \textit{salah} engrave deeply in Muslims their belonging, their membership of a worldwide community, of the population of a virtual worldwide motherland.\textsuperscript{33}

**Particular times of prayer**

\textit{6.45pm: Ramadan} tarawih prayers. \textit{I join the men and women converging on the gate of the mosque. Men go in the main door, women in the side door to the left, up the flights of stairs, until we come into a large room, where women are standing in lines, filling up from}


\textsuperscript{33} \url{https://whenwomenspeak.net/blog/when-we-pray/}
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congregated community to complete the arduous duties of tarawih, finishing in the
darkness of the mid-morning hours.\(^37\)

A specific expression of public communal salah is also found in the prayer for
rain at times of drought, salat al-istisqa‘ (صلاة الاستغفار).\(^38\) Prayed outside, after two
collective raka‘ the imam leads the community in du’a for rain.

**Part of the family**

Families can gather to do salah together in their homes, with a senior male leading the
rest of the family, or women praying side by side. An article on Muslims in the United
States talks of the important place salah has for religious couples. And it reminds us
that the first action of the father of a newborn child is to whisper the call to prayer in
the child’s ear, “so that their first act as a parent involved the literal and symbolic
ritual of instructing or ‘calling,’ their newborn child to prayer.”\(^39\) Young children often
join their parents and mimic their movements, particularly bowing in prostration and
rising again, long before they learn the words or meaning of prayer.

There are particular times when participating in the act of salah is even more
about belonging to the extended family than it is about faith practice. This is especially
so at feasts (eids) and at family funerals.

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In completing salat al-\textit{janazah} (صلاة الجنازة) the funeral prayer, the focus on the body corporate is heightened – theologically and socially. Theologically, it is \textit{fard al-kifayah} (فرض التكافأة) collective duty unlike \textit{fard al-ayn} (فرض العين) individual duty) such as the \textit{hajj} or daily \textit{salah}.

In \textit{fard al-kifayah} (literally: duty of sufficiency) the \textit{ummah} has a collective responsibility to discharge certain duties – funeral rites, military struggle, provision for orphans. If enough members of the community sufficiently discharge the duty, then the obligation is met and individuals are free from responsibility before God. In contrast \textit{fard al-ayn} is always incumbent on the individual and not to fulfil the duty (such as obligatory prayer) is a sin. One article suggests that, “It is not too much to suggest that \textit{fard al-kifayah / fard al-`ayn} take the places in moral discourse of the concepts of public and private spheres,”\textsuperscript{40} Though the individual’s personal responsibility before God is diminished, the sense of social responsibility is heightened. Socially, it is part of one of the most significant rites of passage: the funeral.

Likewise at salat al-\textit{eid} (the \textit{eid} prayer) the focus on community is heightened – it may be the only time an entire family gathers and attends mosque together, affirming both family and communal bonds.

For someone, particularly MBB’s, not praying daily \textit{salah}, or even salat \textit{juma’} may not be particularly remarkable as many Muslims do not do so regularly. But at the time of salat al-\textit{janazah} or salat al-\textit{eid} their absence will be noticeable. Their family will not understand that the MBB is not participating due to personal conviction or theological differences. In this situation theology is seen as secondary to doing what is

\textsuperscript{40} http://islamicus.org/fard-al-kifayah/ e625
perceived to be the right thing (the 'done thing'), which is honouring the dead, and being part of your community. The assumption is that the MBB will participate: to not do so is not received as a passive act but as a deliberate stand against community. It is understood as a declaration of independence and refutation of their place in the family and community.

**Individual prayer**

Salah is primarily communal, participating with the wider Muslim ummah in the same actions and words, even the same direction and language, regardless of where it is being prayed.

There is one use of salah which is more individually focused, and that is the prayer for guidance (صلاة الاستخارة *salat al-istikharah*), for the person who is seeking direction in making a decision. As with all salah, the person needs to be pure (see the details of purification at the beginning of this article). Then they are to pray two *rak’a* of prayer, and then the special petition for guidance, *du’a al-istikharah*. For some, if the prayer for guidance is followed by a good or a bad dream, that may suggest a positive or negative answer.

**Conclusion**

The prayer of salah is foundational to Muslim life and practice. It gives rhythm to communal and family life. Its specific actions and words are mandated: and yet there is also some flexibility for individual circumstances, particularly in the *du’a* included and in the number of *rak’a*.

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41 [https://www.istikhara.com/](https://www.istikhara.com/)
A focus on words and actions may overlook the important role played by salah in embedding values such as submission to God and modesty in the lives of communities and individuals through its practice. Salah can also signal and affirm bonds of family loyalty and allegiance at key times, including both festivals and funerals. Even when practised by individuals on their own in their homes, salah is almost always above all an expression of community belonging.
Reflection
1. The place of prayer in my life as a follower of Jesus:

For me prayer is a place that I can worship God and acknowledge His glory, His greatness and His mighty power. Prayer is a place that I can be reminded how merciful and just is my God. Prayer is a place where I can experience God’s compassionate heart. It also reminds me that He reigns overall and He is the one who is in charge. During prayers God grants me peace of mind that nothing can happen to me that is out of his control or surprises Him.

Furthermore, prayer is a safe place that I can be myself and express my wonder and joy to God and I can pour out to Him the feelings that are not pleasant and overwhelming me. As David would tell God exactly what he thought about his enemies, prayers is a time for me that I can bring all my thoughts and hurts to God without fear of being judged and receive God’s healing.

Prayer is a time that I can be heard as well as hearing the voice of God. It’s a place that I can bring all my cares and worries for my family and friends and be assured that He loves them much more than I love them. As David says in Psalm 144:1 "praise the Lord, who is my rock. He trains my hands for war and gives my fingers skill for battle": during prayers I as a member of God’s army have been trained and empowered to fight and intercede for the salvation of my loved ones.

In response to your question how do I like to pray, I should say sometimes I like to sit in silence as it is said in Roman 8:26 that the Holy Spirit prays for me with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. Other times when I have no words to say I simply enjoy sitting in his presence knowing that He understands my heart. Sometimes I pray while I walk, other times I enjoy joining my family and friends to pray together. For me there is no specific place to pray, I know no matter where I am I can talk to God and seek Him whenever I need His presence, protection, guidance and wisdom.
2. Learning to pray to Jesus, after learning Muslim prayer:

My prayer experience while I’ve become Christian is incomparable with my prayer experience in Islam. When I was a Muslim I should pray in Arabic which is not my mother language and as a Shia Muslim I had to do it three times a day. Islamic prayer is the kind of prayer in which the same words should be repeated every single time that someone prays and it is a monologue conversation with God. I would never feel connected with God and I never experienced God’s presence during Muslim prayer. I just would repeat the same words that even I didn’t know their meanings. Whereas in Christianity I know what I am saying to God as I pray in my mother language and also I can understand what God says to me through reading the Bible. Prayer in Christianity is two way communication with God. I can talk to God just like I talk to a friend. Since I came to Christ, prayer has become a meaningful journey with God for me. I don’t have to repeat the same words every day, I can go to His presence with my questions, ideas and I can express my feelings to him. He hears my prayers and answers my questions. He brings harmony to my mind when I am confused. As we read in Jeremiah 33:3 we have an open invitation from God: “Call to me and I will answer you” and we have a promise that He hears us: "You will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you." (Jeremiah 29:12) Having a compassionate heart and understanding others are two precious gifts that God has given me through my prayers journey in my Christian life.

3. How I learnt to pray:

My spiritual mother had a special influence on my prayer life. She and my other Christian leaders taught me the Lord’s prayer. They also taught me to pray through Scripture: this continues to shape my prayer life today. I’ve been taught to apply God’s promises to my life.

During prayers Holy Spirit has taught me when I go through the storms of life that although sometimes I need to use my authority to stop the rain other times I should ask God to give me power and grace to go through storms. He has been faithful to his promise and
He always equips me and hides me under his wings until the storms pass by, meanwhile He gives me solution for moving forward.

4. Is there anything I miss about Muslim prayer?
No, I don’t miss anything about Muslim prayer. In fact I will never replace even the worst days in my Christian life with the best days in my Muslim life because now through Christ I have a personal relationship with my Heavenly Father whereas in Islam I never could have this kind of relationship with God. I believe I belong to Jesus even during those times that I wouldn’t feel His presence, but in Islam God is always distant and unreachable.

Islamic fasting and prayers might sometimes gave me good feelings but in fact it was exactly what Paul said in Colossians 2:23 "These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh".
Du’a in the 21st Century: exploring women's perspectives
People can ‘talk’ to God about anything: what they feel, what they want, what they hope. Does God answer my prayers? There are WAY too many examples. Would every cell in my body still work if it wasn’t for Allah? Would I be living in this city if it wasn’t for Allah? Would I have my daughter? Some prayers certainly wait to be answered, but it’s always worth it.42

Prayer is something we know Muslims do. We see men heading towards the mosque, prayer clothing on and carrying their prayer mats. We see women crowded into a smaller mosque space and separated from the men, or at home praying by themselves. We see the performance of ritual movements and hear the set words. Women tell us they are abstaining from prayer because they are menstruating, and that they will ‘make up’ their prayers at a later date. These practices of prayer which we most often see and hear about are usually concerned with the five formal salah prayers that Muslims are required to pray each day. Furthermore, if one searches the internet for “prayer in Islam,” the results focus specifically on salah.

But salah is just one of the three types of prayer found in Islam, the other two being du’a and dhikr. When Muslim women speak about du’a, in contrast to salah, many of them use language that sounds more familiar to Christians—they speak of being ‘close’ to God in prayer, for example. This article focuses on conversations recounted by Christian women around the world that they have had with their Muslim friends:

42 Words of a Southeast Asian Muslim woman: unless otherwise noted, all quotes come from When Women Speak... I-View Course participants. The I-View courses are conducted online for women working among Muslim communities who want to connect with others and share their learning about women’s experiences of Islam.
women in very different contexts, from different strands of Islam (Sunni, Shi’a, Sufi), and of different ages, educational levels, and backgrounds. It also draws from current online sources, and seeks to answer the questions: What are du’a? What is the etiquette of du’a? Why make du’a? Is du’a effective? What do du’a tell us about women’s views of God? What is the relationship between du’a and Christian prayer?

**What are du’a?**

One of the ways Muslims call upon God apart from salah is through supplications or requests known as du’a. Du’a are encouraged in both the Qur’an and hadith: “And your Lord says: ‘Call on Me; I will answer [your prayer]’” (Surah Ghafir, 40:60), and “du’a is the essence of worship” (Jami` at-Tirmidhi book 48, chapter 1, hadith 3371).

There are two types of du’a. The first type are those with fixed words which come from the Qur’an or hadith. These are often learned from a young age, and are prayed in specific situations and at specific times, such as before and after meals, before bedtime, upon waking, before entering a house, when going to the toilet, when starting a trip, when ill, as part of funeral prayers, and so forth. Every aspect of life seems to be covered by such du’a. Fixed du’a are widely available as booklets, in phone apps, or in compiled books in various sizes and for various circumstances: for children, for travelling, for daily use, and so forth. One website advocates that women in particular are in need of the “spiritual nourishment” provided by the learning and frequent repetition of du’a from the hadith: “In this way, her heart will remain focused

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on Allah (SWT), her soul will be cleansed and purified, and her iman [faith] will increase.”

The second type of du’a are those which are personal, prayed by someone in their own words. These can be prayed in a person’s “heart” language. Some Southeast Asian women were “very adamant that Allah understands their heart language and it is just as acceptable to him as Arabic.” In South Central Asia, a different word for God is used in du’a as opposed to salah, which indicates “whether someone is talking from their heart or head.” A Central Asian BMB related that when she was a child, her aunt told her that

‘At the end of your ritual prayer you can ask God whatever is in your heart in your own language.’ So this is what I did. I would just quickly recite namaz [salah] waiting for the end so I can talk to Him.

**What is the etiquette of du’a?**

Since du’a are not prayed to make merit (unlike salah), an individual is not required to be ritually clean and pure in order to pray them. Women are therefore able to pray du’a when they are menstruating and during other times in which they are considered impure.

While not required to be ritually clean, Muslims are encouraged to make du’a in an appropriate way. One Southeast Asian lady said, “there is an etiquette to follow, such as starting with Bismillah, using good and polite language, using a soft voice, and ending with amin.” Most Muslims pray du’a prayers with both palms upwards or cupped

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to receive blessing, and afterwards wipe their hands over their face to apply the blessing. Other instructions include using “the clearest and most concise words,” having an attitude of humility (which may be demonstrated by prostrating), calling upon God “with a mixture of hope and fear” (hope that God will hear the du’a and fear that God will be displeased with the actions of the supplicant), facing the qiblah (the direction of Mecca), and repeating the du’a three times.

Pakistani-American Muslim preacher Yasir Qadhi’s book about du’a provides two chapters on “The Pre-conditions of Du’ā” and “The Etiquette of Du’ā,” as well as a chapter on “Discouraged Acts During Du’ā.” He suggests that because du’ā is a “type of worship,” one’s du’a will not be accepted if certain pre-requirements are not met, and one discouraged act includes making grammatical mistakes in one’s Arabic (suggesting

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46 As with posture, the wiping of hands over the face is a common, though somewhat contested, practice. For a discussion of the practice in various schools of Islam, see “What is the ruling on wiping one’s face with his hand after supplication?” Dar Al-Itfa Al-Missriyahh, accessed July 8, 2020, https://www.dar-alifta.org/Foreign/ViewFatwa.aspx?ID=6741.


that Arabic is the preferred language of *du’ā*).\(^51\) All of Qadhi’s recommendations regarding *du’ā* are made with reference to the Qur’an and *hadith*.

It may be that such etiquette and pre-requisites relate primarily to the fixed type of *du’ā* which come from the Qur’an or *hadith*, because other Muslims speak of being able to come before God in *du’ā* prayer at any time and in any way. Ayesha Syahira, a Malaysian author, suggests that “The things we recite are verses that we were told to memorise, but rarely do we truly talk to Allah about the troubles that are weighing down our hearts. Because it feels awkward.”\(^52\) Another author states that

> We can make a direct call to Allah (swt) anytime, anywhere. You don’t have to wait for the right time to call or spend thousands on the phone bill. All you need to do is to call on Allah (swt) with sincerity. You can whisper to Him (swt) or talk out loud; you can cry before Him (swt) or even laugh; you can remember Him (swt) standing, sitting or lying on your side, in solitude or in a crowd. And He (swt) will most definitely be there for you – guaranteed!\(^53\)

### Why make *du’ā*?

*Du’ā* are made for a variety of reasons. Ayesha Syahira encourages her readers to find comfort through making *du’ā*. She says

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...when we are down and sad, we seek other means for comforting ourselves, but often they offer only temporary respite. We forget that true comfort lies only with Allah.

Crying out to God when experiencing troubles appears to be a common reason for making freer du’a prayers. One Middle Eastern lady told me how she prays and writes in a journal to God everything that is on her heart and mind, because God is the only one that she can trust - not even her own mother or sister. Afterwards she feels a sense of relief. Last week, she was sharing with me about a situation that involved disappointment, sadness, longing and some fear and confusion in decision-making. She had prayed about the situation (during her informal prayer [du’a] after her formal evening & early morning prayers), and the next morning felt uneasy and frightened—i.e. not at peace about going ahead with a particular choice—and interpreted that lack of peace as an indication that it was not the ‘fate’ that God wanted for her. She told me how she had been crying all night, and crying to God, asking him why he is withholding good things from her, why her situation is still as it is.

This lady’s experience of ‘journaling’ may be developing as a modern trend, with du’a journals aimed at Muslim women being advertised online through Amazon and other outlets.54

54 One particular journal is listed as “currently unavailable” from Amazon, access August 7, 2020, https://www.amazon.com/Dua-Journal-Quran-Reflection-reflection/dp/0692136487?th=1, but has 40 four- to five-star ratings. It also has its own website, accessed July 1, 2020: https://theduajournal.com/
The prayer that this lady prayed may have been the salat al-istikhara, the prayer for guidance. This prayer has two components, one being two sets of formal rakaʿāt (prayer with prescribed movements and words), and the other being a duʿā. A couple of websites advise that the duʿā can be prayed by itself without the rakaʿāt. For example:

Some people believe that you can only perform istikhara in a state of wudu or after a salah, but if it is not possible to perform the istikhara prayer, like as a traveler or on your menstruation, you can simply read the istikhara dua on its own.55

The gaining of blessings, particularly asking for healing or good health, are also primary reasons why duʿā are made. In South Asia, older women who attend labouring mothers regularly recite fixed duʿā from booklets. COVID-19 has raised the prominence of these types of duʿā, with many circulating on social media platforms. Besides prayers for health, women frequently pray for their children’s educational and business success. Women’s desires are often related to their relational safety:

They want to be free of family tension & obligation, to live at peace with others, to have good husbands/romantic marriages, to be known deeply and loved and pursued, to feel safe in family relationships (i.e. not to be the victims of family gossip, husband’s emotional neglect or financial or physical abuse), to be honoured, to have meaning and hope for the future (i.e. marriage, good work and education opportunities).

Protection from evil is a further key theme in du’a. One Southeast Asian university student said that she makes du’a after sholat “to be protected from Satan,” while another said “My mother always reminds me that whenever I feel like something bad is bothering me I have to pray du’a, which are Ayat Kursi and [Surah] Yaseen.”56

Surah Yaseen is also recited to ward off misfortune/jinn/ghosts from a place:

One friend described the bathroom as the meeting place of Satan and the demons and talked at length about what cannot be done in the bathroom. She said ‘Every time you go in you must pray for protection from the deceiver and deceptions...
You need to be careful pouring hot water on the ground because you will burn Satan and the demons so you always need to pray a du’a for protection.’

Another woman spoke about a Muslim friend who shared how she had felt attacked by evil spirits at night and had struggled for weeks to find a solution—quoting special verses or seeking advice from an Imam, until she finally prayed directly for God to help and found relief.

Intriguingly, David Parkin suggests that among Swahili speaking people in East Africa, du’a can be prayed to other spirits or harmful forces in order to “enable someone to avenge themselves of an enemy, nothing less than witchcraft,” and that one meaning of du’a in Swahili can be “curse.”57

56 Ayat al-Kursi is verse 255 of Surah al-Baqarah, and is often recited to ward off evil spirits. Surah Yaseen (Yasin) is the 36th Surah in the Qur’an, which talks about God’s sovereignty and unlimited power.
57 This reminds us that terminology can be used differently across the Islamic world. David Parkin, “Invocation: Sala, Dua, Sadaka and the Question of Self-determination,” in Islamic Prayer across the Indian Ocean: Inside and Outside the Mosque, ed. David Parkin and Stephen Headley (Surrey, UK: Curzon, 2000), 144.
Some Muslims do not feel as though they can talk to God freely about things they’re struggling with: “Foreigners talk about feelings with God, but we don’t.” They see *du’a* as situational, what they say in specific situations, rather than for specific personal needs.

Women in North Africa commented that they cannot pray to God about problems in their marriages: “We should solve that. Allah isn’t the one we should ask.” A Middle Eastern woman spoke with a Christian friend about the pain in her life. The friend read a Psalm with her that spoke about telling God of the pain, pouring it out to him and him giving peace: “She looked at me with such sadness in her eyes and said, ‘we can never do that.’” Another Christian woman commented that “it seems to me there is no breathing space for wrestling when things are hurtful or don’t make sense.” Many Muslim women feel unable to bare their souls to God and to cry out to him, despite a desire to do so:

My friend thinks it is disrespectful to Allah to express sorrow or pain to him. ‘We must always say thank you no matter what you are feeling.’ When I asked why, she said ‘We must honour Allah, it is shameful to complain or show feelings because then you aren’t honouring him. It’s shame.’ I asked, ‘Doesn’t Allah know how we are feeling anyway?’ The response was ‘yes, but we can’t show it. It is shame.’

**Is *du’a* effective?**

Those who are ‘pure of heart’ are often thought to make more effective *du’a* than others.

My Middle Eastern friend prays *du’a* on the night of power hoping that she’s doing it ‘right’ and that God might accept her prayers, hoping that she has a pure
enough heart to be acceptable because she believes that God only answers the prayers of the pure hearted.

In one North African country there is a particular word for a person who is close to God, and others will go to that person for prayer because God will hear them. Schulz notes that “many Malian Muslims seek the assistance of religious specialists ... to increase the efficiency of petitionary prayer.” Muslim women often see Christian women as having a “closer” relationship with God, or as having “purer hearts,” and thus have desired their prayers, believing them to be more effective. A lady from North Africa saw answer to a prayer that a Christian friend had prayed, “and then she thought I was her talisman to get answers from Jesus...she thinks some people’s prayers are more effective.” A Christian in the Middle East commented that friends perceive her and her husband as “people who can access God’s ear and power,” and that they identify her as “a real Christian, and God listens to her, she’s a good person, and these works make her close to God.” A health worker in South Asia said, “People here beg us to pray for them. There is a big belief in it that it helps.” One South-Central Asian woman felt that she could not come to God because she was having an affair, and she could not call on him because of her actions. She was then happy for a Christian friend to pray for her, using the friend as an intercessor before God.

There are situations, and times where *du’a* are more likely to be accepted. In the last third of the night, while drinking *Zamzam* water, between the call to prayer and the start of *salah*, at the end of *salah*, while prostrating, and particularly on the Night of Power, are all thought to be times of particular efficacy. As explained in more detail below, attitude is also important. Those making *du’a* should not doubt that God is listening and can answer. They should not lose hope or become impatient when they do not see “the results” they want.

The question of how, when, and even if, God answers petitionary prayers is discussed in an article by Atif Khalil, who examines the work of classical Qur’anic exegetes and Sufi psychologists. He concludes that God does respond to every petition, but that the nature of that response differs for each petitioner. Firstly, God will deny the petition of those who do “not fulfill or strive to meet the conditions of *du’a*,” conditions which include the etiquette and pre-requisites already discussed above. The petitioner must “refrain, within one’s capacity, from sinful behaviour,” because God does not love transgressors and therefore he cannot be obliged to respond to their petitions. Secondly, while striving to meet all the conditions of *du’a* is “the surest way to guarantee a response in the particular form one desires,” Khalil acknowledges that even then there is no actual guarantee one will receive one’s petition. If this is the case, then the petitioner will receive a greater reward in the afterlife. Thirdly, if the petitioner has asked for something which is not in their best

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60 Qur’an Surah 7:55 “Call upon your Lord in humility and privately; indeed, He does not like transgressors.” (Saheed International version) Khalil, “Is God Obliged,” 97.
Christian women report being amazed at the ability of their Muslim friends to endure hardship and suffering, being cautious not to question God's care for them, or speak out about the difficulties of life. Those who suffer, or whose du'a prayers are not answered in the way they would like, say that it is God's will for them, to make them “stronger” or to “help them pray more” or make them “a better parent” or make them “the person they are today.” They make comments such as “Allah’s given me this suffering, it’s a blessing, Allah thinks I’m strong enough to endure this,” and some express the belief that “God tests humans, to see if they’ll follow his ways.”

What do du’a tell us about women’s views of God?

For many Sunni Muslims, conviction about predestination (al-qadr) is a strong central teaching, and leads to a stoicism in the face of difficulties and struggles which finds its expression in comments such as “God allows it, so it must be in his will, we can’t change it, must accept it and move on.” The commonly used phrase insha’allah, “if God is willing,” recognises that “God is sovereign, and knows all things and what’s best for us, we have to be content and trust Him and look at the bad experiences as opportunities to learn...the reality is that God allows bad things to happen for our own

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good.” As a consequence, prayer is less about a relationship with God and more about duty and submission to what God has ordained—though this does not negate supplication, since even the supplications themselves are predestined.63

In light of this it can be surprising to hear Muslim women from a variety of backgrounds speak about feeling “near” or “close” to God while they are praying *du’a*. A Christian working in South Central Asia commented that “A lady very close to me describes constantly praying to God and feeling God’s nearness.” Other women from South Central Asia made statements such as “Sometimes I feel like he [God] is directly inside my heart and spirit,” “When I say God’s name, I feel my heart beat,” “Because I am a Muslim, I am friendly with God... we should talk directly to God.” Women in North Africa describe feeling as if they are “between God’s hands.” A Central Asian lady felt that God does listen to her prayers. In the Middle East, one lady “feels God with her personally, surrounding her, supporting her. God is never distant. He is kind, patient, forgiving, loving, supportive and wants us to draw near to him.” Another described feeling close to God while performing the optional, very early morning prayer “because everyone else is asleep, everything is calm and I can concentrate, and I get a feeling of God being close in my heart/mind/soul, and I can pour out my heart to Him and often cry.” In a blog post, Sadijah Ali states that

> When we really break it down, Du’a is a fundamental part of our existence, because it is just talking. We are talking to Allah (swt). How much more simple can it be? As a child, Du’a was never relayed to me in that way, and I always

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viewed it as something formal, something we have to do at the end of prayer and gatherings. Now, I realise Du’a is so much more, it is a direct way of communicating with the One who wants to listen, anytime, anywhere...Allah...loves it when you ask of Him, and it is through asking from Him that you gain a deeper closeness.64

Women often describe God’s nearness in terms of an emotional peace that they feel when they’re calmly meditating, during the hajj, or in communal prayer. Some women may refer to a verse in the Qur’an which says “We [God] are closer to him [man] than his jugular vein.” (Surah Qaaf 50:16), or another verse which says “And when My servants ask you, [O Muhammad], concerning Me - indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me.” (Surah Al-Baqara 2:186).65

It is easy to assume that Muslim women who speak about being “near” or “close” to God mean the same thing that Christians mean. However, if we dig deeper, we find that while the terminology may appear similar, the meanings behind the words are quite different. The context of Surah Qaaf 50:16, is more about judgment than a statement of comfort: the preceding part of the verse speaks of God as Creator knowing what “dark suggestions his [man’s] soul makes to him,”66 and the following verses tell of the two angels which sit upon the right and left shoulders of each person, recording their deeds and words.

A Muslim website expresses the idea that “closeness” to God entails human movement towards him rather than the other way around: “Du'a is a way we become closer to God, acknowledging that He alone can give us our wishes, as well as recognising our shortcomings.” Thus when Muslim women speak of “closeness” or “nearness” to God, what they may actually be expressing is that they are doing what they can to get near to him. For some, this desire for connection and closeness may be found through du'a. Others find it during the intensity of community experiences, particularly hajj or umrah. For some Shi’ite women the “nearness of God was linked to doing the hajj, being born again, having peace, because they knew God knew them.” A Sunni lady said she felt close to God on umrah because: “you were close to all the people around you, with no fighting between people, but a kind of unity and all desiring to be close to God.” Another explained that “because everyone on umrah or hajj is ritually clean, the place is holy, and planes are not allowed to fly over and get in the space between people and God, God is more present.” A Christian said that “Many people I've spoken to who've been on hajj or umrah talk about it as a spiritual, almost supernatural experience. They talk about peace and feeling a heightened spirituality/interaction with God.”

This feeling of closeness to God through intense community experiences was also described by a Muslim woman speaking about the Night of Power (Laylat al-Qadr) during Ramadan:

It's about weeping and submissiveness. God comes down the first heaven and answers prayers. It's seclusion, you and God alone. You feel as if you're flying,

When we pray...

When we pray... tears come, it’s a strange feeling, tears come suddenly. You pray to God, feel with everyone, love everyone, feel soft, forget worries...

A couple of women have mentioned that the Muslims they know want to feel a closeness with God, perhaps that they have felt before on some occasion, and the way this can happen is through obedience: “If they obey then they move themselves closer to God.” “To get back to that closeness, she needs to be observant. She sees closeness and connection as something to be maintained by being a good and religious person.” When a Southeast Asian lady agreed with a Christian that her desire was to know God more and draw closer to him through prayer and fasting, the Christian noted that “her account of fasting and other duties always goes back to reward and rules.”

Although some women do describe feeling ‘near’ to God, they do not express a sense of personal intimacy with God and feel that such a relationship with him “is too foreign” from what they know. Those who express a feeling of closeness to God are doing so on the basis that they have done things to achieve that. It is a one way relationship—“God can be close to us, hear us, and know us, but we can’t know him.”

One Christian has suggested that a Muslim sense of closeness to God is “Sort of like coming close to a beautiful, awesome wonder—being close to it inspires awe, but the object or wonder itself is not moved or affected by you.”

Many other Muslim women also suggest that closeness is God is not something that can be achieved. North African women have expressed the belief that closeness with God “is not their right, not something they could search for. They have to submit, and God is far away. If you try to bring him close, that’s a sign of irreverence and disrespect.” Women in East Africa were offended by Christian talk of God as Father and friend. They declared that it was “sinful” to speak of him in such a way.
East Asia said that “God is far and great and doesn’t have a relationship with us like the way you [Christians] describe it.” For women in Southeast Asia, it seems as though their *du’a* “are more about requests, rather than finding God or even looking for him.”

One question we can ask is that if women do feel close to God through *du’a*, is that a two-way connection? How does God communicate with them? Can they hear God for themselves? The answer to these questions appears to be that no-one expects to hear from God, since there is no personal relationship with him. One woman said “God doesn’t talk to us. We talk to God.” Since it is not expected, when it does appear that God is trying to communicate, women may not believe it:

A friend is going through tough time at the moment. She says she’s waking up in the middle of the night, outside normal prayer times, and really wanting to spend time with God. I’ve asked her “could it be that God is calling you to spend time with him?” She said, “do you think that’s possible?” She feels like that’s happening, but unsure it is possible.

If Christians try to explain their personal relationship with God and how they hear from God, it can be met with blank looks and a lack of understanding. One Central Asian BMB relates that Muslim women have corrected her when she says that God has spoken to her: “the better way to say that is ‘God put in my heart this or that.’” She surmises that “God for them is pure, powerful, fearful and they need to respect him (like a king not like a father), and not just have conversation with him.” When a Christian spoke with women about reading Scripture, looking at what it says and what God is saying to her through it, the response was “that’s different, the Qur’an is explained to us, what God wants us to do”—thus focusing on obedience to what God has already laid out, rather than developing an ongoing relationship with him. Another
response that has been heard is “if you hear a voice from God, it signifies that death is near,” and one BMB “spoke about great fear and a sense for impending death when he heard God calling him as part of his conversion journey.”

**What is the relationship between du’a and Christian prayer?**

In making a distinction between Christian prayer and Islamic prayer, one website asserts that prayer is salah, and that “Dua certainly holds certain similarities to the prayer of Christians, however it should not be confused with what Muslims call prayer.” Du’a in this understanding is a “way of feeling that connection [the direct connection one has during salah] to God at anytime (sic), in any place.”68 Similarly, another website separates du’a from “prayer” when discussing when it is appropriate to make du’a.69 It is possible that the distinction which this author is making between du’a and Christian prayer is referring to the fixed type of du’a. Whether this is actually the case or not, du’a may be seen as something different to “prayer,” (i.e. salah) which may explain why many Muslims feel that Christians “don’t pray.” Furthermore, if du’a are primarily thought of as fixed verses from the Qur’an and hadith, it explains why some Christians have had the experience of giving someone a written prayer quoting Scripture, which is then kept and continually repeated—for example, over a sick person, as would be done with a fixed du’a.

So what is prayer for Christians? What do our prayers say about our relationship with God? What are the similarities and differences between our prayers

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and Muslim *du’a*? Given that there are numerous Christian perspectives on prayer, just as there are different Muslim perspectives on *du’a*, this article focuses on what biblical prayer can tell us about God’s character, his accessibility, and how his people have a relationship with him.70

The foundation of biblical prayer is a covenant relationship with God, an “everlasting covenant” made with Abraham and his offspring “throughout their generations” (Gen 17:1-14). God promised to Moses that he would be the Israelite’s God, and that they would be his people (Ex 6:6-8). On this basis, the Israelites can speak to, call out to, or cry out to God (expressions which are frequently used to denote prayer). The nature of God is that he reveals himself to people, and those of other nations are not excluded from this revelation—the Lord comes to Hagar in the wilderness, and she declares that “You are a God who sees me...Truly here I have seen him who looks after me.” (Gen 16:8-13)

Jesus’ death initiates the new covenant that is prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-34, the culmination of God’s covenant-making actions to redeem and form a people for himself. In this new covenant, followers now have an intimacy with and access to God which was only foreshadowed in the Old Testament. It is this intimacy with God which is an unfulfilled longing within the hearts of many Muslims. With the coming of Jesus, God himself has taken the action to draw near to us, and to approach us. The coming of Christ is God’s final and foremost revelation, the Living Word in personal form.

70 Since the vocabulary of prayer in the Bible is varied in both the original languages and in translation, this article will concentrate on a few key terms, as detailed in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*: ‘Cry’ 1:408-412; ‘Lament’ 2:416-424; ‘Prayer, Ask, Kneel, Beg, Worship, Knock’ 2:855-886; ‘Thank, Praise, Eucharist’ 3:816-820. It will not seek to explore all terms, nor construct a biblical theology of prayer. Bible quotes are taken from the English Standard Version.
In Jesus, God makes his blessing and power available to help all those in need, whether they are Israelites or not—he initiates the conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, going against all cultural norms of behaviour (Jn 4); he heals the Roman centurion’s servant (Luke 7:1-10); and he frees the Gerasene man from unclean spirits (Mark 5:1-20).

The Trinitarian nature of God is important in prayer, since the persons of the Trinity enable and draw prayer in particular ways, always reflecting the intimacy of the triune relationship of God himself: we are assured that we are turning towards a relational entity, a God who loves us and abides in us (1 John 4:7-17). This is a major difference between du’a and prayer in the Bible. Jesus enables God’s people to “draw near to the throne of grace” with confidence “that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need,” since we now have a high priest who sympathizes with us in our weaknesses because he “has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (Heb 4:14-16) Jesus shows that we can address God as ‘Father’ when we pray (Luke 11:2). He also uses relational terms to address people, particularly women, directly—“Daughter, your faith has made you well” (Mark 5:34). In Romans Paul asserts that “the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” (Rom 8:26-27) The concept of intercession (Shafa’ah) is a highly contested one in Islam and is related to forgiveness on the Day of

71 These verses use the Greek hyperentychanei and entychanei from the root entynchanō and translate them as intercede.
Judgment. This is very different to Paul’s meaning, where he assures God’s people that even when we do not know what God’s will is and thus how best to pray, the Spirit “knows the will of the Father and he asks that the particular decisions and circumstances come to pass which will in fact magnify Christ best.” In this context, God is revealed as one who is present and actively involved together with the believer in prayer, through the Holy Spirit.

Thanksgiving, praise, and worship, in which God’s people recognise who God is, what he has done, and what he can do, are major themes of prayer in the Bible: for example Hannah’s prayer of praise and worship after Samuel is born in 1 Sam 2:1-10, and Mary’s Magnificat upon receiving Elizabeth’s greeting and blessing in Luke 1:46-55. In the Old Testament, praise of God is often associated with confession of sin and prayer for his mercy, as seen for example in Solomon’s prayer in 1 Kings 8:22-53. In the New Testament, Paul exhorts his audience to make their petitions to God with simultaneous thanksgiving to him (e.g. Phil 4:6, Col 4:2). Similarly, in many fixed and free du’a Muslims express their thanks to God, acknowledging who he is, asking for his assistance, and requesting his forgiveness for sin. Unlike in fixed du’a, however, there are no proscriptions for etiquette regarding prayer for God’s people, though the actions of kneeling and prostration are both associated with it: kneeling at times of

72 There are verses in the Qur’an which both support the idea of intercession (e.g. Surah 2:255) and negate it (e.g. Surah 2:254). See for example, “The Concept of Intercession in Islam- Part 1,” New Muslim, August 19, 2019, accessed July 29, 2020, https://www.newmuslim.net/abcs-of-islam/articles-of-faith/the-concept-of-intercession-in-islam-part-1/ and https://www.answering-islam.org/Quran/Contra/intercession.html.


74 Oh Allah! You are my Lord. There is no deity but You. You created me and I am your slave-servant. I am trying my best to keep my oath of faith to You, and to seek to live in the hope of Your promise. I seek refuge in You from my greatest evil deeds. I acknowledge Your blessings upon me, and I acknowledge my sins. So forgive me, for none but You can forgive sins. https://www.learnreligions.com/prayers-of-thanks-2004522; cf. https://sunnah.com/urn/1616650
urgent and earnest prayer (e.g. Luke 22:41, Acts 7:40 and 9:40), and to indicate the humility of the person praying before a holy, almighty God (e.g. Deut 9:18, 25). Just as some Muslims suggest they too can talk to God anywhere and at any time, God’s people can come to pray before him anywhere, either in public or private—examples being at a well (Gen 24:26-27), from the belly of a fish (Jonah 2), on the side of a mountain (Matt 14:23), and while in prison (Acts 14:25).

As in du’a, God’s people are encouraged to bring their requests to him and to ask him for the things they need (Matt 6:11). It is in these supplications and petitions that we see the most similarities between du’a and prayers in the Bible. Just as Muslims make du’a for children, protection, and health and healing, so too these are frequent requests made in the Bible. We read about Hannah’s heartfelt, distressed prayer for a son in the temple of the Lord (1 Sam 1:17); Elijah cries out to God to heal the widow of Zarephath’s son (1 Kgs 17:17-24); James encourages believers to pray for those who are suffering and sick (Jas 5:13-16); and Paul says we should not “be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” (Phil 4:6) God’s people ask with the assurance that he knows what they need and that he will not withhold from them (Luke 11:5-13). We also see prayers for protection from enemies, evil, and deliverance (1 Sam 7:8, Ps 142:5-7, Rom 15:30-33, Phil 1:18-19). Persistence in prayer is encouraged. A Canaanite woman who cries out to Jesus to deliver her demon-possessed daughter is not dissuaded by his initial silence and then rebuff, and her faith and persistence are rewarded by his granting of her request (Matt 15:21-28). Jesus also tells a parable about a widow and a judge specifically to show his disciples “that they should always pray and not give up” (Luke 18:1-8). Paul asks the Colossians to “continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.” (Col 4:2)
As has been discussed above, while some Muslims do feel they can cry out to God, others do not, and they may certainly not feel free to complain to him about their situation. In contrast, intense, emotional lament prayers can be offered by God’s people, as seen for example in the Psalms (e.g. Ps 69:3), in Lamentations (e.g. Lam 2:18-19), and in Habakkuk (e.g. Hab 1:2). On the Mount of Olives, Luke’s gospel reports that Jesus “being in agony…prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). Three times he entreats his Father “if it be possible, let this cup pass from me,” yet still he prays “nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matt 26:38-44), and on the cross he cries out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46; cf. Ps 22:1) In these prayers, God seems absent, far away, distant. God’s people do not hold back their feelings, but openly pour out their hearts, beseeching God to act, to help them, and to not withhold his favour or mercy from them. God’s people are not afraid to come to him and even complain to him but do so in as an expression of dependence upon him, trusting that he hears them, cares for them, and will answer them. The complaints, sorrow, and pain that are expressed in these prayers are framed within an understanding of God as both sovereign, all-powerful, and also all-loving, fundamentally good, and redemptive. Those praying do not doubt his goodness and commitment to them, but are complaining that their experience does not match the reality they believe in. In the same way, Martha states her complaint while at the same time making her faith explicit when she says to Jesus “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (John 11:32)

At the same time, our prayers are not purely for ourselves. The Lord’s prayer puts praying for God’s name to be kept holy (“hallowed”) and for his kingdom to come “on earth as it is in heaven” above praying for our needs. We long for the day when the kingdom will fully come, and are to pray for the day when Jesus returns, when we will
be in the new heaven and the new earth, praising God eternally within his constant presence and blessing. We are to pray that others will come to know the Lord:

Hezekiah prayed that God would not only save the Israelites from the king of Assyria, but that “all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O Lord, are God alone” (2 Kgs 19:19), and at Lazarus’ tomb Jesus thanks his Father for hearing him, praying this so that those standing around him would “believe that you sent me.” (John 11:42) Paul encourages the Colossians to continue in thankful prayer, and to pray for him and Timothy “that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.” (Col 4:2-4) He also regularly models prayer which gives thanks for others and their faith, and which asks for their continued spiritual growth and understanding (Eph 1:15-21, Phil 1:3, Col 1:3-14).

**Conclusion**

So what is the difference between the prayers that Christians make and those of Muslims? Sometimes, we may not feel that there is much difference in what our Muslim friends tell us, particularly when they speak of God being “near” or “close,” if they say they can “talk” to God, or if they speak about answered prayer. Thus, it is worth exploring their terminology more carefully. What does “nearness” or “closeness” to God mean for them—what does it look like? How is it manifest? If they can talk to God, can God talk to them, and if so, in what ways? What assurance do they have that God hears and answers their prayer and what does that assurance look like in practice? If God answers prayer, how does he do so? We can also acknowledge that God in his sovereignty may choose to answer their prayers in ways that are readily apparent to us as well as them and can thank God for that.

We can tell personal stories about how God is at work in our lives, and we can
speak about our relationship with him. We can pray with them and for them. Most of the time, women are happy to be prayed for and are often very touched, even crying. They say things like they’ve “never felt anything like that,” or “it’s so nice, you actually talk to God,” and they comment that the prayers of Christians are “different,” and “feel different,” to theirs. They desire intimacy with God, yet are often unsure that they can come to Him: “My ‘God loves your little girl very much, and cares that she is sick,’ was met with ‘Really? You think so? I hope so.’” For some Muslims “how Christians pray and actually relate to God has been the high point of coming to a Christian meeting. They’re impressed by it.” We can use more blessing prayers. We can give them written prayers or Scripture verses, trusting that God’s word is “living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword” (Heb 4:12) and that God can work through them:

A Muslim girl in our city was sent a text message by an ex-boyfriend, who was a Christian and who now lived on a different island. In it he challenged her to finish her evening prayers with the Lord’s prayer. He wrote it out for her in the text message. So that evening she did exactly this - after her own evening prayers she recited the Lord’s prayer, word for word. And that night God gave her a dream of Jesus. She did the same thing the next evening and had another dream of Jesus. The third evening she didn’t bother with her own prayers and just recited the Lord’s prayer. And God gave her a dream telling her where to go to get baptised. She did this and is now a strong follower of Christ despite facing serious opposition.

And we can keep praying for our friends, that they will come to know and experience a true intimacy with God that they are not yet able to imagine.
Qur'an and Prayer
Whilst the Qur’an provides no formal lessons on prayer it informs Muslim prayer in a number of ways.

The Qur’an opens in prayer. The first sura, the Fatihah, is used in the five times a day ritual salah prayers: twice in the morning prayer, three times in sunset prayer, four times in the noon, afternoon and evening prayer, making a total of at least seventeen times a day. Moucarry describes the Qur’an as opening with a prayer from man, whilst ‘the rest of the Qur’an is God’s response’ providing guidance as to the “straight path” which man has sought and prayed for.75 Kenneth Cragg also described the Fatihah as ‘the only place where the Qur’an “prays” – save in narrative situations of the patriarchs and the prophets where there is address to God ...’76. But these observations do not give a complete picture of the relationship the Qur’an has with prayer.

There are numerous qur’anic phrases which are used, even recommended, as part of the regular salah, or at least as a main constituent of dhikr. Surat al-Ikhlas (Q112) ‘enters into most salat performances and countess litanies of praise’77. Whilst, as our co-authored article reminds us, the final two suras (Q113 and Q114) are frequently used as protection from evil. I have heard it observed that, rather like

Celtic circling prayer, the main text of the Qur’an is bounded by the Fatiḥah at the beginning and by the two invocations of protection at the end. Surat al-Baqarah concludes with a prayer for forgiveness which is ‘often recited before going to sleep’\(^7\). Amongst other examples of regularly used Qur’an portions is Surat Yā Sīn (Q36) which ‘is recited at burials, on the approach of death and on the “Night of Quittance” (laylat al-barā’a, a kind of Muslim All Souls Night)’. Indeed, one of the distinct differences between the important, authoritative Hadith material so beloved of faithful Sunni Muslims for all that it teaches about Islamic practice, and the Qur’an, is that it is the latter, the Qur’an which is taken on the tongue in prayer and worship.

There are theories that formulas in the Qur’an, not least summary phrases providing names of God, are pre-existing prayer phrases from Christian or Jewish, if not other sectarian communities from the region in which Islam emerged\(^7\). Neuwirth suggests that this could be true of some of the many qul (‘say’) phrases in the Qur’an\(^8\). The Andalusian mystic philosopher, Ibn al-Arabi, set out specific guidance on how to use the beautiful names found in the Qur’an to call on God\(^8\). Meanwhile the style and sound of the Qur’an, not least its tight rhyming patterns, are deemed by many to ‘actualise the revelatory act itself’ when correctly recited, creating the nearest thing to encounter with God in prayer that conservative Islam will admit\(^8\).

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\(^7\) Ibid.,

\(^8\) Motzki, Harald. ‘Alternative accounts of the Qur’an’s formation’ in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.) The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’an, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006: 61


\(^8\) Graham and Kermani, ‘Recitation ...’, 118.
As Cragg observes, there are examples of extempore prayer in narrative passages in the Qur'an. Amongst these are the accounts: of the mother of Miriam who prayed for a child whom she could dedicate to God and Zechariah’s prayer for a virtuous offspring (Ahl-ʿImran, Q3:35-36 & 38), of Abraham who dedicated the place of worship, requesting that those who followed on would be nation submitted to God (al-Baqara, Q2:128-129) and of Noah initially lamenting his drowning son (Hud, Q11:45). Commentaries do not dwell on these as lessons about prayer but it is clear that exemplars of faith are people of prayer. Unsurprisingly, then, it is a verse enjoining the performing of prayer from the setting of the sun to the darkness of the night (Bani Isra’il, Q17:78) which is the most commonly used to adorn mosque hall mihrabs. The Qur’an attests to the centrality of prayer in the life of Muslims, even as it provides the phrases and sounds with which the prescribed liturgical prayers are offered.

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In Touch with the Divine
I had gone with Ahmed to his Sufi group a couple of times, and this time there was an initiation rite for several new disciples. The initiation rites followed the more familiar activities of a sermon, ritual prayers and quiet chanting. After this the initiands gathered in a small group, a long scarf from the saint (the *pir*) went around the circle and all involved held on to it. There were ritual words and readings and then the *pir* touched each disciple to show where they had a special connection with the divine. For some it was the spleen, for others it was liver, heart or other bodily organs. The session ended with joint prayers and then a meal.

For such disciples in South Asia, belonging to a Sufi group (a Sufi *Torika*) is a key part of their religious life. Many hours are devoted to prayer and spiritual practices that they hope will enrich their lives and bring them closer to Allah. These practices include fairly orthodox looking times of communal prayer (a shared time of *dua* following on from *salah* prayers), chanting and listening to sermons, as well as practices more unfamiliar to me such as a small group of men chanting different sections of the Qur’an in unison. However, it’s not just the unfamiliar practises that highlight differences in approach from what I am used to, but also the practises I thought reflect mine but are actually approached with different assumptions and aims. Understanding foundational assumptions and world views are important in engaging well with our Muslim neighbours and its worth looking at what these might be within the communities we are called to.

**Grace – Physical and Empowering**

As a Kiwi from a fairly evangelical background, I’ve imbibed descriptions of grace as “God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense”. Grace is seen as God’s goodness and benevolence
in action so that we are undeservedly saved as part of God’s loving kindness. Moments of grace may show it in action, but we tend to conceive of his grace as an overarching will to goodness.

The idea of grace in many Muslim settings is rather different. The Arabic word barakha is changed in Bengali and pronounced borkhot, but the same concept seems to be in play. Rather than an overarching will to goodness, borkhot/barakha is more an active power, harboured in physical things, bringing about goodness when we are in touch with it. This idea of grace sees it as something physical and something spread by touch. A place, such as a saint’s grave, may be a strong repository of this grace. Similarly a holy person, or holy object (such as holy zamzam water from the well in Mecca) may be a repository for this.

I’ve witnessed people coming back from the Haj being welcomed and embraced chest to chest, in the knowledge that some of their borkhot will rub off on to the welcomer. The immediate family will then limit such welcomes as they don’t want all the borkhot to be eroded. Similarly, their hand luggage was 20kg of water from Mecca, which is kept and used judiciously for those wanting blessing (e.g. illness or fertility). We see a similar concept of grace in a physicality in the New Testament. Thus we can see in Acts 19.12 Paul’s handkerchief and aprons were sent off to bring healing to sick people, as a physical carrier of grace and power. Similarly, we can note that for the Centurion to tell Jesus that he didn’t need to come to touch to bring healing was seen as a marker of extraordinary faith, as normally touch would be required.

This concept of grace as a physical reality spread by touch lies behind activities such as pilgrimage, relics, holy water, being touched by holy people, amulets or other such mediators of touch. For example, a sick person may be taken to the imam, who, having made a diagnosis, choses the right verses of the Qur’an and may copy them out
When we pray… Having done that he will burn the paper and put it in water which is then given to the patient for them to drink. This is an example of literally taking in the power and grace of scripture. However, the question arises, does that affect an understanding of prayer.

**Prayer – Physical Grace Bringing Power and Blessing by the Touching of Sound**

One of the activities that Ahmed would partake in, is that of a small group of men reciting the Qur’an. They will get together and divide the Qur’anic chapters up into even length segments. Sitting in a circle, they will all jointly loudly recite their section of the Qur’an. I had often wondered at the perceive benefits of this and being told it was “to receive blessing” didn’t shed much light on matters. The blessing obviously doesn’t lie in the mental cognition of understanding the word, as too much was happening at once. Something else is in play here.

A deeper understanding is gained when we realise that the sound of the Qur’an is a physical sense. As the sound washes over the hearer, so the physicality of the barakha of the words touches the hearer and brings blessing. The perception is of being touched by grace and blessed. It doesn’t matter that there are 12 men reciting aloud at the same time, as that is just 12 sources of physical grace washing over them. It doesn’t matter that, like 80% of Muslims, they don’t understand Arabic. Rather, the holy language (c.f Latin) washes over them. This isn’t about intellectual understanding, its physical reception of grace and power.

**Audible Recitation – an Aural Icon?**

It seems to me that looking at how icons in the orthodox church are perceived can further deepen our understanding of audible prayer for my Muslim neighbours. Icons have been described as being “windows to the divine”. They are not seen as divine in
themselves, but like thin panes of glass in a window separating us from the outside, the warmth on the other side is almost palpable. As sunlight warms glass and can be felt through the glass, so the divine can be experienced through the icon. Thus we see actions like kissing icons, holding them to one’s chest and otherwise touching them. To touch an icon is to be in touch with the divine by thin separation.

As an icon has a physicality, so the audible recitation of the Qur’an and other prayers is to have a physical carrier of the divine that can touch me and wash over me. The stance one takes in dua prayers is to stand with hands outstretched at waist height with palms up. When the prayer is finished, then I bring my hands up and wipe them over my face, almost like I’ve received handful of grace and I then wipe it on myself as a covering. So, one way of looking at this is recognising the similarity between Christian icon use and prayers by my Muslim neighbour. Its almost like prayer acts as an aural icon, an icon that touches my ears, instead of eyes and hands.

**The Spirit in Mission**

For Christians, this touch by the divine is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It’s not just being touched by a power, but filled with the person of the Spirit, led by Him, and empowered by Him (Luke 4.1, 14). We know his power and his relating to us, speaking to us, and leading of us. Yes, the power (*dunamis*) of the Spirit is real, but more than that, so is His joining with us in our life.

One discussion on ritual purity and prayer that I had with some Muslim colleagues touched on how they see that we are ritually unclean and need to wash before prayers in order for our prayers to be effective. The sad fact was that ritual uncleanness happened so quickly after this. For them, the world touched us and made us unclean and we were trapped by that. I then made my point:
We’re supposed to be slaves to Allah (abd’Allah), but it seems that to live like this is to be slaves to dirt, slaves to impurity. This separates us from Allah, and keeps us separated from Him. Wouldn’t it be good if, instead of the world touching us and making us unclean, wouldn’t it be good if his Holy Spirit (His pak-Ruh), came into us, filled us and flowed out from us. So instead of the world touching us and making us unclean, His Holy Spirit would flow through us, touch the world and make it clean.

To say my friends were amazed and astonished that this might even be possible is an understatement. “Yes, if that was possible, that would be good news indeed!” Good news, indeed.

**Conclusion**

The power of grace, barakha, is seen as having a strong physical sense to it. Thus grace is thought of as spreading by touch. When my Muslim neighbours are at prayer, for them, the sound is imbued with grace, with barakha. To hear this is to be touched by grace, to be blessed and receive physical benefits. As a Christian, I can add to that. This grace is not just possible through external physicality, but is part of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives, the Spirit that helps us know God as abba, Father. When we pray his grace doesn’t only flow over us, it flows through us, as the Spirit helps us pray.
Reflection
DO

I was searching for truth. Everything I have believed was wrong. I realized I was standing on the sand which wasn’t strong enough to hold me through my life. I was young and I decided to follow my religion-Islam. I started asking questions from my grandmother who prayed Muslim Prayer 5 times a day. I thought she was the true, devoted Muslim, who prayed no matter what, who never skipped a prayer. But then she never learned to read. So she couldn’t teach me Muslim prayer. Then I asked my older aunts who knew how to read and write. When I asked her how to pray Namaz, she told me that I have to do it in original language – Arab language. I still remember that conversation with her.

“But you don’t speak Arabic”, I said to my aunt.

“It is ok, you just need to write it down how it sounds and learn by heart this prayer. God wants you to speak to Him in the original language”, she said to me.

“But I don’t even know what I am saying to Him?! What if I say something wrong and call God a donkey?”. If God existed I wanted to be careful with what I say.

So my aunt didn’t know what to say to me because she learned the prayer that way. So I wrote down all the prayers and learned the rituals with it. I talked with many other relatives about God, I asking them how I can find Him. But no one could answer me, or their answers didn’t satisfy me.

I started praying Namaz.84 I washed myself every time and I prayed. One thing my aunt taught me was that at the end of the prayer I can ask God whatever I want in my own language. So I would recite Namaz in Arabic language very fast to get to the end so I could talk to Him in my own language.

84 Also known as salah.
“God, If you created the universe” I would start, “if you created me and all the other nations, don’t You understand my language? I don’t even know what I am saying to You. I am really sorry if I called You a donkey or something worse, I just don’t know this language. If you exist how can I find you? I am asking many people but they cannot answer me.”

This was my prayer for a long time. I asked and I waited. Then one day I met one lady with whom I talked only 15 minutes and she answered all my questions about God. She talked about Him like she knew him very well. Then she gave me a Bible, the Book I have heard a lot about, which was forbidden to touch or read. She told me that I could find the answers to all my questions in it. I took the Book, I hugged it very tight and on the way home something happened in my heart. I came home and started reading the Bible from the beginning to the end. I couldn’t stop. I finished the whole book in one month. After I finished I started talking to God and told him that I believe in him, I believe in Jesus.

My prayers have changed. I started talking to Him and in my heart I hear Him talking back to me. Now I have conversations with Him. He found me. He heard my prayers, He knew I was looking for Him, He responded to me. I realized I could talk to Him wherever I go, whatever I am doing, day or night. I would wake up and would just start talking to Him. I remember asking the same lady who gave me the Bible, “Can I talk to him in the toilet? It is a dirty place, it is haram to talk with the Holy one in a dirty place.” She replied, “yes, God is more concerned with my heart than where I am or what I’m doing.” Later as I read the Bible I understood the true meaning of sin and what is dirty to God.

God is amazing. He created all the different languages. He understands us before we even say anything to Him. He hears our thoughts, our hearts, our souls. We can actually have conversations with Him.
Praying with my Muslim Friends
“We have depression”, Fatema said. “I am worried about my husband. He is depression. We are waiting to hear about a job. He has sent many CVs but is told no. We are waiting for a friend to ring us.”

Fatema and Ahmed arrived here 3 years ago, seeking asylum. They have no family here. No financial support. They have been learning English and are now waiting for work. We spoke for a while and then I said “Can I pray for you?” She smiled, “Oh yes!”

“I pray in Jesus name”, I said, “because Jesus told us to pray in His name… and because I follow him it's as if Jesus himself is praying and God always hears his prayers.” The smile remained and she nodded.

“Heavenly Father”, I prayed, “Thank you that you are powerful and wise. Thank you that you are good… … …”

I seem to have many opportunities like this as I move through the community and meet Muslim women. Some are in desperate need, some have deeply personal struggles while others want prayer for less critical aspects of life. Privacy in prayer doesn’t seem to be an issue for many either.

In the midst of a crowded hall women and men (mostly women) gather for the regular food bank. They come early to get the best available but this suits us well. We spend an hour or two moving around, talking with our friends, discovering what is on their hearts, sharing Jesus’ perspective with them through story and discussion and prayer. I am always amazed that no one has ever refused prayer – even in a crowded room, even when surrounded by Muslim men and women, some they know and most they don’t.

All of these experiences have caused me to think more deeply about prayer. How do Muslim people view Christian prayer since they seem to welcome it so readily?
How should we think about these prayers? What is our purpose in praying for our Muslim friends? How bold ought we be in these prayers? What ought we pray? What happens after we pray?

1. **How do our Muslim friends view Christian prayer?**

I asked a few Muslim friends ... “What do you understand about Christian prayer?”

“When I pray for you in the name of Jesus, what do you think I am doing? What is happening?”

“you are performing dua – just as we do.” “you perform salat on Sundays in church and dua when you pray for me.”

“Why do you think I pray in the name of Jesus? That’s different from your prayers isn’t it?”

“yes... it’s a blessing. It’s like [she motioned signing the cross on her chest] ... it’s protection, a blessing”

Syeda had moved into a new house and was not sleeping well. “I keep seeing a man from my country walking around outside but I know he isn’t here. I hear noises in the night inside the house but no one else is here. I need protection from spirits...will you bless my house? Will you pray for me?”

Mary thinks that Christian prayer is a powerful thing to ask for when nothing else works.

She had back pain and nightmares. Nothing brought her relief. She asked her brother who was in her home country what to do. He said “ask your Christian friend to do something with a cross and pray.” Despite his and Mary’s piety they had no hesitation in using Christian prayer as a spiritual weapon and even the cross as some sort of talisman, a tool to use against evil much like amulets or the hand of Fatima.
Perhaps it is a case of “whatever works, I'll give anything a try”. Perhaps this is desperation despite a belief system that would question if not reject outright the power of Jesus Christ in their lives today.

It is clear that while our Muslim friend agrees to, welcomes and even asks for Christian prayer, it doesn’t mean that she believes in the one we pray to or through. So, ought we pray in these situations? Are we not just perpetuating their occultic beliefs?

Does God answer prayers for those who reject Jesus? Are we supporting the lie that they don’t need to follow Jesus to be heard by God? I suppose this depends on our purpose in praying for them.

2. What is Christian Prayer and what is our purpose in praying in the presence of our Muslim friends?

What is Christian prayer?

As I write about these things I am aware of the complex nature of our prayer. It is far more than simply asking God for things although this is commonly what our Muslim friends ask us to do for them. And while we may well intercede for them in prayer, our prayers for them and in their presence are so much more...they are also part of our daily worship.

Prayer is an expression of our relationship with Almighty God. His people are communicating with God as a child communicates with her father, a father who is good, trustworthy, kind; a father who loves his daughter and wants what is best for her; a father who makes promises; a father who always does what he promises to do. His daughters and sons know this and therefore depend on him alone for all things.

We pray as part of our daily worship. To acknowledge his power and unchanging character we praise him; he provides for us so we thank him; we need his forgiveness
and mercy and so we confess our sins and ask for that forgiveness; and we depend on him for everything so we ask for what we need boldly, confidently, freely, frequently. Nothing is too big or too small. Nothing is too shameful that we cannot bring it to our Heavenly Father. In fact, his daughters (and sons) MUST come to him in their shame because its then that he will restore their honour. His daughters and sons must come to him repentant, dependent and expectant that he will restore their honour and status.

He is the creator of all the world and his children trust that he will accept them, comfort them, rebuke them if necessary, forgive them, teach them and include them in his family. These are promises God has made to those who trust in Jesus Christ, people who know that Jesus Christ died and rose again for their justification and sanctification. God’s people have the seal of God’s Spirit affirming to them God’s faithfulness and so they seek to live to the honour of Jesus Christ.

Prayer of thanks and praise and confession and supplication is a logical activity for God’s purified and beloved people.

Our friends do not enjoy this confidence in God because they do not believe in God as a good Father. In a discussion group where we were talking about the Sermon on the Mount, Sanaa leaned over to another Muslim lady and whispered loudly “they think they are God’s children... they don’t realise they are his slaves”.

Our Muslim friends do not believe that Jesus’ death purifies them so that they can pray boldly before God. Mariam even told me “we can’t tell God if we are sad or angry or depressed. That dishonours him. We must simply say Alhumdulallah and carry on.” They are not taught that God restores their honour, even in their shame and uncleanness, when they come to him repentantly and ask for his forgiveness in Christ.
Islam denies the very foundation of our prayer namely Jesus’ death, resurrection and its power. Our Muslim friends then are robbed of the subsequent confidence we have to pray and the expectation that God hears, delights in and answers our prayer.

**And so, what is our purpose as we pray for our Muslim friends?**

Primarily we are crying out to *our* good Father to have mercy on them. We are the daughters of Almighty God, the creator of heaven and earth asking our Father to answer our requests for our friends. He is not bound to our Muslim friends as he is to us. He has made no covenant with them nor has he promised them anything. They don’t have a relationship with God that gives them the privilege of praying to Almighty God as ‘our Father’. More than this they reject the possibility of it. However, when we pray for them, we are calling on our Father’s generosity to have mercy on those who reject Jesus; to provide for the outsider. Our Muslim friends probably won’t recognise this as an extreme act of grace but that’s exactly what it is. His grace has been poured out on us, his children, and we know that as his children, we can approach him boldly and confidently with such requests for others. Our God causes rain to fall on the just and unjust. He provides for his creation. And so, we pray for our Muslim friends.

Secondly, we want our friends to witness our worship. We praise him for his unchanging character declaring the awe with which we esteem him. We call on a God who has made promises and who keeps promises. We therefore thank him before our friends for what he has provided. We recall our unworthiness and yet God’s willingness

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85 Matt 6:5-15; also Luke 11:1-4. In the context of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is teaching his followers, he instructs them in what life with him is like, how to live be a light in the world; how to treat others; and how to relate to God. This is the privilege of followers of Jesus – to call God ‘Father’.
to hear and answer us. We depend totally on his grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. And, we pray boldly, specifically and with confidence for the needs of our Muslim friend.

Thirdly, we want our friends to witness the supernatural and intimate nature of prayer, to see how we relate to him as honoured daughters. We want them to be curious, intrigued, even jealous. We want them to ask us questions. My friend Sadia was about to have an interview. She was very nervous and so I asked if I could pray for her. “yes please” she said. And so, I prayed... “Heavenly Father, .... ... Amen”

She asked me, “who were you talking to?” “God”, I answered, “only he can do what I asked of him!” “So why did you call him Father?”

Khadijah always asks me to pray for her after any conversation. She explained to me once “when you pray it’s like you know God.”

At the same time, we want to show that we honour God. Ala used to come to our Sunday night gathering where extempore prayer was a major feature. She often remarked on the intimacy of our prayers but also kept saying “its dua, you only pray dua”. Without diminishing the intimacy of extempore Christian prayer, to preface or end our prayers with a recitation from Scripture such as Psalm 23 or the Lord’s Prayer or prayers from Paul’s letters or a direct blessing from Scripture may connect with friends who are used to more formal recitation in their prayers yet would provide Christian content. 86 We are praying God’s words to honour the exalted creator and judge of all things.

86 E.g. Paul’s prayers Numbers 6:24-26. Using Scriptural prayers and Psalms when we pray before our Muslim friends may show them the holiness of our prayers; as we use God’s words we can demonstrate that we are praying prayers that connect with God, are real and worthy of God hearing.
Fourthly, we want them to see that as we pray in Jesus’ name, God can be trusted with our deepest needs and most shameful secrets. In fact, he wants us to come to him with these needs. This is what the work of Jesus Christ has accomplished. God is not only the God who hears us and sees us as he did Hagar. He welcomes us into his throne room. We stand before him in union with Jesus Christ. He hears us just as he heard the prayers of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. And so, our confidence is in a Heavenly Father who answers the prayers we pray because we stand with Jesus Christ. We want them to see that God answers prayer in Jesus name.

How bold can we be in our prayers for our friends? I’ve found myself being cautious in praying big prayers for my friends for fear that God won’t give them the job or the visa or heal their mother. I fear that this will ‘prove’ to them that prayer in Jesus name doesn’t work and is without foundation. However, I have found that this is not their response when prayers aren’t answered as they want. As followers of Jesus in similar situations, we conclude that God is wise and he answering these prayers as is best for us, according to need not desire; according to his honour and kingdom rather than our personal wishes. And we will praise him for that and ask him to help us pray according to his will. In a similar way, Muslim people believe God will do what he will do. If it’s not answered as they expect, their prayer (even one in Jesus’ name prayed by a Christian) just wasn’t according to the will of Allah. It doesn’t provide a barrier to their accepting Christian prayer again.

87 Gen 18:13
3. **What Happens After We Pray?**

So, we pray for our friend in Jesus’ name; she observes how we worship God; she witnesses our relationship with our heavenly Father; she waits on his answer. What do we do next?

I met Khadijah when she first arrived here. She had run away from her family and from an abusive marriage. She had never met a follower of Jesus before but ended up living with me on and off for several years. I prayed for her often and she’d say, “I love it when you pray”. I’d focus on a different aspect of God’s character in my prayers and I’d use relevant parts of Scripture. I was able to talk with her about it after praying because in this context, she was listening. Khadijah is a young woman who had been abused by men most of her life. Slowly, so slowly, she is starting to walk towards God. She has started to see that despite God being father, he is a Good Father.

Not everyone is as attentive to the prayers we pray as Khadijah. The children are playing around us, perhaps the woman we are praying for is chastising them during our prayer or occasionally, she is honouring this time and space. Nevertheless, there is more we can do in the wake of praying for our Muslim friends.

We can read or tell them Bible stories to explain the basis of our prayer. We know God is Father because Jesus teaches us to call him Father\(^88\); we know Jesus can and does heal because he is full of compassion and healed many including Simon’s mother-in-law; the paralytic; lepers; and the woman with the withered hand\(^89\); we know Jesus

\(^{89}\) Mark 1:29-34, 2:1-12, 1:40-45; Luke 17:11-19, 13:10-17
has power over evil because he sent the Legion of evil spirits away⁹⁰; we know he restores honour when we are covered in shame because Jesus restored outcast and sinful women⁹¹; we know God forgives because Jesus made that possible⁹²; and we know God wants us to ask him for whatever we might need because this is what Jesus taught us.⁹³

We can ask them about the answers to our prayers. Together we can praise God and celebrate his faithfulness. We can speak of God’s willingness to hear us as we speak from our hearts and comfort us. We can tell stories of answered prayer from our own life or those from Scripture like Hagar or Hannah; stories of Jesus’ mercy and compassion on the shameful and needy like the Samaritan woman or the sinful woman who anointed Jesus’ feet.⁹⁴

We can continue to talk of the nature of our worship in prayer and speak of Jesus’ call to us to pray without ceasing, and to throw ourselves onto God’s mercy despite the shame.⁹⁵

4. Discipling in Prayer

Christian prayer is a foreign concept to our Muslim friends. As we talk about prayer and pray in their presence it forms part of their discipleship process towards Christ. As well, it’s vital that we specifically teach Believers from a Muslim Background how to

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⁹¹ E.g. the woman with an issue of blood in Luke 8:40-56 and sinful woman anointing Jesus feet in Luke 7:36-50
⁹⁴ Genesis 16, 21:1-20; John 4; Luke 7:36-50
⁹⁵ 1 Thess 5:17; the parable of the persistent widow / the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:1-14 or Jesus’ encounter with woman who had been bleeding for 12 years in Luke 8:40-56.
pray. It is not helpful for them to say “just talk to God” and then expect them to pick it up. We must teach our new sisters and brothers that our prayerful worship of God includes praise, thanks, confession and intercession.96

One Iranian brother told me how he loved spending time in praise and thanks as we gathered together. “Imams don’t pray thanks because this will make people think they have everything and people won’t give them anything”.

We must continue to demonstrate our dependence on God; that he is good; and that we thank him in good times and in times of need. Similarly, we always spend time praising God simply for who he is because he never changes.

Our Muslim friends perform wudu in an effort cleanse themselves before salat. Rather than dismiss this as unnecessary before we pray, consider why it is that we can pray with such boldness. Cleansing is necessary - but we are cleansed by Jesus’ work on the cross. We must demonstrate and teach this clearly, confessing our unworthiness (in whatever way is appropriate to the context) along with thanking God for our forgiveness and purification in Christ. We are not only modelling prayer, we are helping our friends grasp the nature of sin (believers as well as Muslim). We must always remember the seriousness of our sin and the necessity to be forgiven and cleansed by God.

And of course, we come in prayer to God to request those things we need. The greater our friends’ understanding of God’s character, the more confident they become in asking God for anything. We want to not only teach but also model what it is to keep asking God with shameless persistence for those things we need because he is

96 Psalm 34:1; 48:1; 89:5; 100; 105:2; 145:21; 146; 150; 1Thess 5:17; Phil 4:4-6; Heb 13:15; Jas 5:13.
our Heavenly Father. He wants us to keep depending on him not at a distance, not pretending to be OK but authentically, realistically, intimately.

God has given us, those united with Christ and in Christ the privilege of prayer. What a gift it is to pray for our Muslim friends - that they will come to know Jesus Christ as we do. And what a gift it is to pray for them, in their presence. We join with them as they cry out to Allah, crying to our Heavenly Father that he will have mercy on them in every way.
Reflection
1. The place of prayer in my life as a follower of Jesus:
For me as a follower of Jesus, praying is the only way that my soul can breathe. Praying is the only way that I can be connected to God and worship him through the Holy Spirit. Prayer is the only opportunity that I can be open to God’s gifts and His invitation and I can respond to His love.

During my devotional times God shares His thoughts, His power, His wisdom and guidance with me. Prayer is my stability, my calm and my tranquility when I am stressed and under pressure.

Prayer is the place that my desires line up with God’s desires for me. Through prayer I connect to the One who is the source of my salvation, hope, life, joy, freedom, strength, deliverance, protection, healing and comfort.

Prayer is one of the most powerful weapons that God has given us and I have been learning the more I pray on my knees the more I see God’s victory in my life and in my family and loved ones.

2. Learning to pray to Jesus, after learning Muslim prayer:
Praying to Jesus for the first time in my life was accompanied with a miracle in my body. After I heard for the first time in my life that Jesus loves me and He was crucified for my sins and He rose at the third day, I asked him to reveal himself to me by healing my body and he did answer my prayer and healed me. It was so amazing to realise that He loves me and He answered the prayer of a sinner like me.

Praying to Jesus is two-way communication with God whereas Muslim prayer is one way communication. Unlike prayer in Islam, praying to Jesus is not based on force and
compulsion but it is based on love and relationship with God. I can talk to Him anytime at any place with my own mother language.

During Muslim prayer there was no connection between me and God and I couldn't bring my emotions and needs to God whereas while I pray to Jesus I can pour out my heart to him knowing that no condemnation awaits me.

Praying to Jesus for me is so enjoyable as I know not only He hears my cries but He answers my prayers. As the Psalmist says He knows me even before I speak a word, He is all around me. He is behind me and in front of me. He holds me in his power. I'm amazed at how well he knows me. It's more than I can understand (Psalm 139).

3. How I learnt to pray?

Learning to pray, like learning to play an instrument, takes a lot of time and practice and it also requires guidance, support and help from someone else. In the same way, when I came to Christ, the Lord has placed women of God such as my sister and my spiritual mother in my life whose with support and prayers helped me to grow in my faith. Their hunger and thirst for God, their passion for Christ, their zeal for the Word of God and their perseverance in praying inspired and encouraged me to grow in my relationship with Jesus.

They taught me how to read and understand the Bible and I gradually learnt and am still learning that the Bible contains many role models such as Moses, David, Daniel, Hannah, Esther, Paul, Peter, etc. Their relationship with God has been an inspiration to me. However, by reading their life stories I have been learning even the greatest role models had to endure real problems, had their own weaknesses and sins and they didn’t always please God like me.
I should also add without the Holy Spirit I do not know how to pray. He is the source of my help as Jesus said in John 14:16: And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.

4. Is there anything I miss about Muslim prayer?

I enjoy and feast at the table Jesus, my shepherd has prepared before me and I never miss anything about being constantly hungry during my Muslim life.