

meco | international

MAGAZINE

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Ramadan

Includes: It's Ramadan: Let's Pray ■ Children - a Window of Opportunity ■ Too Hot to Handle

MECO Magazine

Keeping you up-to-date and affirming the importance of your role in the ministry of MECO.



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Email info@aboutmeco.org

MECO International is an interdenominational fellowship of evangelical Christians from many countries with shared goals for the Middle East. During 150 years of service in the region, MECO has played an important part in the growth of the church, and now serves in many Middle Eastern countries.

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Pray it again Sam...

(with apologies to Woody Allen)

Wow! When I consider the practice of an average, reasonably devout Muslim, it leaves the practice of an average, reasonably devout western Christian for dead in terms of reasonable devoutness.



Chris Grantham, MECO's New Zealand Director, challenges us as Christians to consider what we can learn from Muslims about their commitment to praying and fasting.

For our part, many in the 'Christian' west do church for Christmas, and for large numbers of them that's it for the year, weddings and funeral excepted. One step up from that is Easter, and some of the Christmas-attendees make their second visit on Easter Sunday. But in terms of preparation for our significant Christian festivals, most western Christians - and specifically the regular Sunday-by-Sunday church-attending Christians - are left well behind by many Muslims in their practice.

When I visit the Middle East my stays are never long enough to immunise me from the Muslim call to prayer, tuneful or otherwise. However, from time to time I take it as a call for me to pray - for those I'm visiting, for those they are serving. Likewise, thousands of Christians worldwide take Ramadan as a call to prayer and take part in the '30 Days of Prayer' movement (www.30-days.net).

During Ramadan, Muslims traditionally break their fast at sunset with the ritual eating of a date just as the Prophet Muhammad was believed to have done. I enjoy my dates, imported from the Muslim world, and I've decided to use my consumption thereof as another prompt to pray.

Would you like a date with me?

It's Ramadan: Let's Pray

Is it 30 days of spiritual discipline or 30 days of misery?
Is it 30 days of fasting or 30 days of family obligation and feasting?

Mike, a MECO worker who is a pastor in Egypt, gives some insight on how we can be praying for Muslims across the world during this month of Ramadan.

Ramadan is the best, most significant time in the Muslim calendar. It's a month of prayer, first and foremost. Earnest prayer is the point. Our Muslim friends and neighbours fast for a month, longing for God's blessing. They are absolutely convinced that God is there, and they long to know His nature, to be sure He is for them and not against them. So this August they will seek Him, disciplining themselves during fiercely hot days without food or water. Long nights of feasting certainly follow, but it's still a considerable sacrifice to make.

What actually happens

Three things always impress me about Ramadan: Already dutiful and disciplined people putting in extra hours of prayer. The

early evening hour of stillness and quiet refreshment that comes with the eating of the first date and the fast-breaking meal (*Iftar*). And the street tables of mercy set to provide a meal for those too far from home or too poor to cook for themselves.

"Our Muslim neighbours almost always say, "Pray for me, pray for us.""

Agreed, not much gets done during the month. In a city that drives on its horns, tempers fray as days wear on and weeks pass too slowly. Daytime lethargy is followed by visiting and feasting through the night - so not much sleeping, not much rest. Not a great pattern for living; many put on weight during the month. Others lament the confusion of spiritual disciplines with decorated shops and homes, the pressure to buy new clothes, the obligation to make visits and give presents. Does that ring any bells?

During Ramadan, our Muslim neighbours almost always say,



More than 13 million Muslims visit Mecca annually.

Psalm 29: Here's what to pray

When our supporters' group sent us Psalm 29, they wanted us to be sure the Lord is in charge, whatever threatens to overwhelm us, be it war or the turmoil of change. As the Psalm begins we watch and listen as the angels ascribe glory and power to God; as it ends we're caught up singing the same song with them.


David's song powerfully portrays nature's stormy forces as they sweep in from the sea, hammer through Lebanon, then head south to play themselves out in the deserts below. But God is greater. Seven times we hear God's authority expressed as His voice rings out like peals of thunder over the whole world. The Psalm is a circular song of praise and witness to all around; as we sing, we invite our neighbours to join in worship.

We're assured that the Lord is in full control of the natural forces we fear and the human storms ravaging this part of the world. We're clear His settled purpose, revealed in the last two verses, is to give and to bless His people with strength and peace. We know that nothing can deflect Him from His purpose. And we know now's the time to be steady in prayer and Christian witness to our seeking friends and neighbours.

"Pray for me, pray for us." Let's do it. Pray God will bless them. Pray He'll come alongside them. Pray He'll open their eyes to know Him better. Pray His forgiveness will be known and His name honoured throughout the world. We know they will not find it in Islam, no matter how much they pray and fast. It's only available in Jesus Christ, who gave His life for us, and came to bring life, life in abundance (John 10:10).

Getting involved

Consider fasting yourself during Ramadan. When you miss a meal, use the time to pray for Muslims colleagues, neighbours and friends. Be ready to visit them in the evenings, especially at the end of the month when Eid celebrations go on for days. Take your time, ask what they're doing and why, show an interest. At each stage, ask the Lord to come by His Spirit and meet them in their longing.

It's Ramadan. Let's pray. 



Picture: Worshippers must perform *Wudu*, a ritual cleaning before prayer. A prayer mat keeps the worshipper clean and comfortable during the prayer.

Reaching Out during Ramadan

Mzeh*, a Muslim background believer, describes what she feels are the key ways for making an impact for the gospel during Ramadan.

Fourteen years ago, Mzeh*, a Syrian Sunni Muslim living in Lebanon, came to know Jesus as her Saviour.

She offers the following advice for Christians who want to reach out to their Muslim neighbours during Ramadan:

1 Pray for them and fast along with them

"During the month of Ramadan I choose to fast so that my people will come to know Jesus (*Issa Al Masih*)."

If you have Muslim friends or colleagues and you know they are fasting, she says don't intentionally eat and drink in front of them.

Be sensitive to the fact that they only drink and eat in the evening and will be hungry and thirsty throughout the day.

If you decide to fast during Ramadan, and Muslim friends or colleagues realise this, she says the door will open for you to share why you are fasting, so be prepared to answer their questions.

"This is my opportunity to tell them about Christ."

2 Be hospitable


Consider inviting Muslim friends and colleagues to your home for *Iftar*, the evening meal when Muslims break their fast during Ramadan. Accept invitations to their homes for *Iftar*. "This is my opportunity to tell them about Christ and His teachings about fasting and praying," says Mzeh.

If you do go to a Muslim home for *Iftar*, take along a small gift of sweets and during the meal eat a modest amount of food - not too much and not too little.

Also watch your table manners and follow the example of your hosts.

Before going to their home, try researching the customs of your host family's culture and try learning a little of their language.

3 Consider giving gifts

If you know a poor Muslim family, consider providing food, or a gift of money, for their evening meal. Include with your gift a pamphlet about *Issa Al Masih*. 

Fact about Ramadan - did you know that:

- The word *Ramadan* is derived from an Arabic word for intense heat, scorched ground and shortness of food and drink.
- Ramadan is considered the holiest month in the year because it commemorates the time when it is said that the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Mohammed.
- With the exception of children, the elderly and the infirmed, Muslims are expected to abstain from eating and drinking during the daylight hours of Ramadan. Each day's fast ends with the evening meal known as *Iftar*. The meal begins with the ritual eating of a date, followed by the actual meal. Although *Iftar* can be a simple meal, it can also be a banquet, where large numbers of people gather.
- In the Middle East, most markets close down during the evening meal and then re-open later in the evening. After their evening meal, Muslims shop, eat, visit with friends and relatives - sometimes late into the night.
- Ramadan is held during the ninth month in the Islamic calendar, beginning and ending with the sighting of the new moon. This year it will begin at sunset on July 31st and end on August 30.
- The holiest night of the year for Muslims occurs during Ramadan. Called *Laylat al-Qadr* - 'the night of decree or measures' - it is the night that Muslims believe the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Mohammed.
- *Eid ul-Fitr* is the three-day holiday that marks the end of the 30 days of Ramadan. *Eid ul-Fitr* means 'the Festival of Breaking the Fast' and begins on the first day of the Islamic month of Shawwal. During *Eid*, food is donated to the poor and people wear their best clothes - usually new. Muslims are also encouraged to forgive and forget the differences and disputes they have had with others during the past year. It is also a time for giving gifts to children and close relatives.



* Name changed for security.



Breaking the day's fast with a date before the evening meal called *Iftar*

Children - A Window of Opportunity

Seven years ago a young Middle Eastern pastor and his wife were perplexed.

Although their church was located in a predominately Christian neighbourhood, their neighbours weren't interested in attending church. One day, as the pastor's wife was praying about the 'hard ground' she and her husband were working with, the Lord impressed upon her that the children in the community were the good soil. From that revelation, she was led to develop a summer day camp that has as many as 150 children attending each year. During the rest of the year, the church runs a Thursday program for children that begins at 4.00pm and continues throughout the evening, with different age groups coming at different times. Older youth are also being equipped so that they can mentor younger children.

This work among children is very significant.

According to mission strategist, Luis Bush, 80% of all Christians accept Jesus as Saviour before the age of 15. He notes that children between the ages of 4 and 14 are a demographic grouping that is most open to the gospel message.

Describing this age group as the 4/14 Window, he says it is a "profoundly formative period when perspectives are shaped either

positively or negatively and when a view of one's own significance or lack of significance is formulated."

The significance of the 4/14 Window
Dr. Bush, who lectures and writes about the 4/14 Window, stresses that Scripture is very clear about the importance of children. In his booklet - 'Raising Up a New Generation from the 4/14 Window to Transform The World' - he writes: "Have we really listened to Jesus' teaching about the place of children in the kingdom of God? First, they model the essence of gospel faith and faithful discipleship by showing us how to humbly repent and to trust in the God of salvation. Second, to 'welcome' a child - that is to accept, love, value and respect a child - is to welcome Christ Himself. Finally, as Jesus made very clear, whoever neglects, abuses, hinders or turns away a child from faith in Christ will face severe judgment from God Himself."


MECO's work with children

Ever since Elizabeth Bowen Thompson went to Lebanon in 1860 to help widows and orphans, children have been at the heart of MECO's ministry. Today, MECO people are teaching, tutoring, working with disabled children, serving in Sunday schools and volunteering in orphanages. Our people have also been privileged to work with the pastor's wife who developed the summer camp. Some have helped her write the curriculum for the camp; others have served alongside her as camp volunteers.

"So much more could be done with children across the Middle East, if we had more people willing to come out and work with them," says Stuart Plowman, MECO's Director of Development. He points out that according to Operation World, a global survey published for Christians who want to pray for the world, 40-50% per cent of the population in the Middle East is under the age of 15 years of age.

"80% of all Christians accept Jesus as Saviour before the age of 15."

"People don't realise how vital working with children is," he adds. "We need people who have a heart for children; people who have taught in Sunday schools or been youth leaders. We need teachers and youth pastors. We need people of all ages who have a vision for sharing the good news about Jesus with children."

If this describes you and you sense God calling you to the Middle East, please contact the MECO office in your country or visit our website at www.aboutmeco.org. Or if you know of someone who might be interested in working in the Middle East with children, please give them this article to read. 

Action!

Find out about more opportunities to work with children in the Middle East on page 11!



There are so many opportunities to reach out to children in the Middle East!

Too hot to handle

How adaptable are you when it comes to climate? Test yourself!
 Answer **True** or **False** to the statements below and then check your answers.

Helen, a MECO teacher in Egypt, illustrates just how hot it gets in the Middle East during the summer season, and what people do to cope with the conditions.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 It takes 6 months for your body to adapt to living in a different temperature. | 7 You shouldn't open too many windows in hot weather, despite the through-wind you may create. |
| 2 You feel cooler if you wear long sleeves and long trousers or skirts. | 8 During the hot months of Ramadan, people can drink water during the day. |
| 3 To stay hydrated you need to drink at least 6 glasses of water a day. | 9 Foreigners are not expected to fast along with locals. |
| 4 You have to apply sun cream several times daily. | 10 The heat makes everyone slow and relaxed. |
| 5 The noise of air conditioning or a fan at night keeps you awake. | 11 You should wear a broad hat and carry an umbrella in very hot sun. |
| 6 Everyone takes a siesta during the hottest part of the day. | 12 The weather is ideal from November to April. |

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| 1 False - Your body doesn't adapt. You just learn how to change your lifestyle. | 5 False - The white noise of the AC or fan can help to mask the shouting and car honking in the street. | 9 True - Maybe, but it's very insensitive to eat or drink in public during Ramadan, and you may invite rude comments or threats. |
| 2 False - You feel cooler if the breeze reaches your skin, but cultural adaptation requires you to cover as much skin as you can. | 6 False - In the city, many offices have AC so everyone continues to work long hours. | 10 True - Slow; False Relaxed. People's tempers fray and there is a sharp increase in car accidents due to impatience, especially during Ramadan. |
| 3 False - Six is not enough. Aim for 12! | 7 True - The hot wind can feel like an all body hair dryer and it's usually full of sand. | 11 True - But you'll be the only one who does! |
| 4 True - This is ideal, but applying sun cream feels pointless because you sweat it off instantly. | 8 False - Muslims don't eat or drink between sunrise or sunset during Ramadan regardless of the heat. | 12 True - Winter and spring are great in the Middle East! |

Could God use you to change lives in the Middle East?

MECO is looking for people to serve with us as:

- Teacher - Amman, Jordan**
Length: 2+ years (short term workers accepted depending on qualifications).
Language: English. **Qualifications:** Teachers certificate and experience.
- House Mother and Helper - near Beirut, Lebanon**
Length: 2+ years **Language:** English. Some Arabic would be useful.
Qualifications: None, just the love of children. Sewing, craft work, ability to encourage homework and relate cross-culturally useful.
- Teacher - Mountain Village, Lebanon**
Description: Serving in a Christian village school with mainly non-Christian Druze students aged 3 - 18 years. **Length:** 1+ years **Language:** English.
Qualifications: Qualified teacher (Nursery, elementary/junior and secondary).
- Refugee Worker - Cairo, Egypt**
Description: Serving Sudanese refugees in a local church.
Length: 1+ years. **Language:** English, Arabic is desirable.
- Community Based Rehabilitation Worker - Iraqi Kurdistan**
Length: 1 month - 2+ years **Language:** Willing to learn Sorani Kurdish.
Qualifications: Hold appropriate qualifications from their home countries.
- Café Manager - Cyprus**
Length: 1+ years **Language:** English. Turkish and Iranian an advantage.
Useful Qualifications: Previous experience in management.
- Teacher - Cairo, Egypt**
Description: Maadi Children's Study Centre, Cairo, Egypt. **Length:** 1+ years
Language: English. Willingness to learn Arabic.
Qualifications: Qualified teachers with teaching certificates.

For more exciting opportunities and information, visit www.aboutmeco.org/opportunities