

## Praying in Riyadh the Capital of Saudi Arabia



**A**s the sun sinks behind the beige clusters of low-rise buildings, muezzin call out across the city in advance of maghreb, the fourth prayer of the day. At the city's largest mosque, Al Rajhi, the parking lot fills with SUVs and new sedans. Prior to praying, Mutawa washes and then walks barefoot across the plush oriental carpet of the interior, which could easily fit a few thousand faithful. Chandeliers hang over the men - six rows deep of young and old.\*

Imagine the scene:

All the men are lined up shoulder to shoulder facing Mecca. As each one lifts his hands beside his ears their prayers begin:

*"Allahu Akbar (Allah is the greatest)*

*Praise and glory be to you O Allah*

*Blessed be Your Name, Exalted be Your Majesty and Glory.*

*There is no god but You.*

*I seek refuge with Allah from Satan the cursed one."*

Then the group quietly recites part of the Qur'an named Al-Fatiha (1st chapter called a "sura"):

*"In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds; Most Gracious, Most Merciful; Master of the Day of Judgment. You alone do we worship, and You alone do we ask for help. Show us the straight path, the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your grace, those whose portion is not wrath, and who do not go astray."*

Each man concentrates on his prayers as they all recite quietly another part of the Qur'an called the Sura Al-Ikhlās (Chapter 112) followed by: *"Allahu Akbar"*

The whole group then bows partially and repeats three times: *"Glory be to my Lord who is the most great."*

Afterwards with their bodies erect they say,

*"God hears the one who praises him.*

*Oh, our Lord, all the praise be to You."*

Then bowing with their foreheads to the floor all repeat three times: *"Allahu Akbar, Oh God, Glory be to You, the Most High."*

Finally all say in unison *"Allahu Akbar"* and raise their upper bodies while remaining on their knees. Prostrating themselves a second time they repeat three times, *"Praised be my Lord, Most High" and "Allahu Akbar."*

This series of actions and repeated phrases is called a "raka'ah" (a prayer round). In the course of the five obligatory daily prayer times, Muslims usually complete 17 prayer rounds a day (2-4 for each prayer time). In 50 years a Muslim who prays regularly will repeat the entire

\* *"Saudi Jeans" And Calls To Prayer In Riyadh, Modernity Bumps Against Religious Tradition" by Michael B. Farrell Dec. 10, 2006 (Christian Science Monitor).*



prayer ritual at least 300,000 times.

For Muslims the purpose of prayer is to formally remember Allah and show one's devotion to and respect for Him. Muslims believe that Islamic prayer purifies their hearts and helps them stand firm against moral wrongdoing. While Muslims sincerely seek to honor God through their prayers, they are not actually seeking to meet God in the Christian sense. The communication is only one way. No Muslim is ever expecting God to speak back to him. Praying in Jesus' name and based on his sacrifice is a distinct Christian privilege which Muslims need to discover. Jesus is truly "the straight path, the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your grace" (cited above). May Muslims discover Him.



*Above: Riyadh—a very modern city.  
left: The Saudi Ministry of the Interior*

### PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ *Pray for the city of Riyadh. May the people have an increased hunger to know the living God and to be in real communication with Him (Jeremiah 31:34 and John 17:3).*
- ▶ *A significant number of foreign Christians live in Riyadh. Pray that they will be able to be witnesses for Christ like Joseph and Daniel who served in countries far from their homes (Genesis 39-41 and Daniel 1-2).*
- ▶ *Many Muslims are particularly sensitive to dreams. Pray for revelations of the risen Messiah.*



*The Islamic confession of faith is on the Saudi flag.*

### Islam explained

**M**uslims believe in Allah, who is unique, all powerful, gracious and merciful to all Muslims. The Islamic faith is lived out according to five "pillars" that must be adhered to if one is to hope for salvation.

#### *The Five Pillars are:*

1. *Reciting the Creed (shahada) "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet".*
2. *Prayer (salat) - At five set times a day.*
3. *Alms giving (zakat) - Both obligatory and voluntary giving to the poor.*
4. *Fasting (saum) - Especially during the "holy" month of Ramadan.*
5. *Pilgrimage (hajj) - At least once in a lifetime to Mecca.*

While a Muslim may observe each of these pillars, there is still no guarantee of forgiveness. There is no atonement for sin in Islam, and Muslims generally believe that their religious acts can purify them from sin.