



Waiting and Watching

**How to pray for
Southeast Asian
Muslims in Ramadan**

22 March – 21 April 2023

• 31 Days of Prayer •

Southeast Asian Muslims Wait & Watch

From the northern tip of Myanmar to the most southern point of Indonesia, Southeast Asia is home to around 275 million Muslims. Like Muslims around the globe, they will be waiting and watching to begin the holy month of Ramadan. Watching, because it is the sighting of the new moon that signals the start of the fast; Waiting, because of the growing excitement to begin this special month.

For Muslims, fasting involves not eating, drinking or smoking during daylight hours, and it is one of the five pillars of Islam. The four other pillars are the declaration of faith, prayer, charitable giving, and the pilgrimage to Mecca – for those who are financially and physically able. Muslims believe that during this month, the ninth month in the Islamic calendar, the Prophet Muhammad received the first verses of their holy book, the Qur'an. The reasons why Muslims fast may vary: some want to empathise with those who are materially poor, many hope it will be an opportunity to strengthen their faith, but most hope that they will receive a reward from God - a welcome counterbalance to the consequences of sins committed during the year.

Whilst Muslims all around the world will be fasting this month, Ramadan looks slightly different in Southeast Asia as it mixes with local languages and cultures. In this prayer guide, you will be joining Muslim people groups in Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Cambodia and Thailand as they wait & watch through their most special time of year. Each week we will focus on a specific country or ethnic group but the prayers are relevant for Muslims across Southeast Asia.



Whether you use this guide to pray once a week or every day, on your own or in a group, you are invited to enter into this month as one who waits along with Southeast Asia's Muslims, watching for how the LORD will work amongst these precious people as you pray.



I wait for the LORD, my whole
being waits, and in his word
I put my hope. I wait for the
LORD more than watchmen
wait for the morning, more than
watchmen wait for the morning.

Psalm 130:5-6 NIV



Devote yourselves to prayer,
being watchful and thankful.

Colossians 4:2 NIV



The designs throughout this brochure have been inspired by the ancient Southeast Asian art form known as *batik*. Creating batik requires a lot of waiting & watching, as the dyeing process has to be repeated several times. Like prayer, it needs hard work and patience, producing beautiful results.

Waiting & Watching expectantly

In the morning, Lord, you
hear my voice: in the morning
I lay my requests before you
and wait expectantly.

Psalm 5:3 NIV

We begin the month of Ramadan with the Muslim people of Malaysia. Despite being a majority Muslim country, Malaysian culture is a unique blend of Malay, Chinese, Indian and European influences and a variety of faiths. But for its Muslims, who make up almost two-thirds of the population, hopes and expectations for the month ahead are high.

In a fishing village on the coast of Malaysia, Imran finishes mending his nets as the sun dips below the horizon and the call to evening prayer is heard. This particular call heralds the beginning of Ramadan, in the Islamic year 1444. All over Southeast Asia, this moment follows weeks of excitement. Local markets are buzzing with women who have planned the first week's evening menus and grumble about the high food prices at this time of year. The wealthier have hosted *majlis kesyukuran* – thanksgiving events to acknowledge the blessings they have received in the last year. The more religious have resolved to read more of their holy book this month and to take every chance to pray collectively. There is great enthusiasm to complete the fast, with the hope that God might reward them.

For Imran, anticipation for the special month ahead is mixed with the daily worry of how to raise his family on the income he gets from fishing. Many Muslims in Malaysia will benefit from shortened working hours during Ramadan, returning home early to rest until it's time to break the fast. For people like Imran, however, physically demanding jobs will make completing the fast almost impossible.

Day 1 – Wednesday 22nd March

We think of Muslims across Southeast Asia today, Lord, who will be enthusiastic to begin Ramadan this evening. We pray that you will exceed their expectations and introduce them to Jesus Christ.

Day 2 - Thursday 23rd March

Lord, we pray for Muslims like Imran this month, who feel excluded from Ramadan for reasons such as economic or social status. May your Good News reach their ears and touch their hearts.

Day 3 - Friday 24th March

As special dishes are being prepared for iftar – the nightly meal when Muslims break the fast - we pray that you will give Southeast Asian Muslims the opportunity to “taste and see that the LORD is good.” (Psalm 34:8 NIV)

Day 4- Saturday 25th March

We pray for the church across Malaysia this Ramadan. Lord, strengthen their faith and help them to love and serve their Muslim neighbours.

Waiting & Watching together

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 3:6 NIV

This week we are waiting & watching with the 230 million Muslims who live across the Indonesian archipelago. The most populous Muslim-majority country in the world, Indonesia is home to around 250 Muslim people groups. Each people group has its own heart language and culture, and yet is unified through the traditions, rules and bonds of faith that Islam provides.

Nabila says goodbye to her family and takes the long bus journey through mountains and past rice fields back to Surabaya, a big city on the east coast of Java, where she now lives and works. Nabila loves starting Ramadan with her family in the village and is excited that she'll see them again soon to celebrate *Eid al-Fitr*, the festival at the end of the fasting month. As a child, Nabila's world was her family, her school and the local mosque. The bright lights and diverse population of Surabaya was a surprise to Nabila, and her family were hesitant to let her leave the safety of the village. But they didn't need to worry, Nabila is a dutiful daughter. In the city, she attends evening meetings at her local mosque, where the community comes together throughout Ramadan for religious teaching and prayer. She feels comforted by its familiarity and sense of community, which reminds her of home. Last week Nabila was invited to an English Club that meets in the city centre, but she is unsure about going. She has often been taught about the godless and destructive influences of Western culture, and she doesn't want to worry her parents that she might be mixing with the wrong crowd.

Day 5 – Sunday 26th March

Thank you, Lord, for making us members of one body, sharing together in the promise in Christ. Please mercifully extend that opportunity to people like Nabila this Ramadan.

Day 6 – Monday 27th March

We thank you, Father, for the importance of family within Southeast Asian Muslim communities. Please use these strong bonds as channels through which your Gospel can be shared and believed.

Day 7 – Tuesday 28th March

Strong family bonds can make individual decisions to follow Jesus very difficult. Lord, strengthen and protect those who are drawn to him but are fearful of shaming their families.

Day 8 – Wednesday 29th March

We pray for those experiencing difficult family relationships because they have turned to Christ. Fill them with the joy of being your child and soften the hearts of their relatives.

Day 9 - Thursday 30th March

Lord, as social media becomes a huge outside influence in society, may these online platforms be used to spread the news of Jesus amongst Southeast Asian Muslim people groups.

Day 10 – Friday 31st March

There are occasional acts of violence between religious groups in Southeast Asia. God of Peace, please restrain evil and enable helpful conversations to take place between faiths.

Day 11 – Saturday 1st April

Western culture is assumed by Muslims to be Christian culture. Lord, break down unhelpful stereotypes through genuine interfaith friendships.

Waiting & Watching for satisfaction

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

John 6:35 NIV

This week we are entering the third week of fasting with the Brunei Malay. A small country situated on the north coast of Borneo, Brunei has a population of around 400,000. But size isn't everything – its government controls significant petroleum and natural gas reserves, which provide Brunei Malays with high standards of healthcare and education. Whilst their material needs are abundantly met, God alone knows what longings remain unfulfilled deep inside.

As Rayyan sits with his wife and children at their favourite restaurant, waiting to break the fast, time seems to slow down to a virtual standstill. Some fast days feel particularly long, despite the shortened office hours. Rayyan's eyes look at the glass of *Bandung* in front of him, as he longs to satisfy his thirst with the sweet, rose-flavoured milk. His fingers feel for the cigarettes in his pocket - not smoking during daylight hours is just as challenging as not eating and drinking. Some years he gives into temptation, but these lapses in self-discipline are not openly talked about. Brunei is a conservative Islamic society where strict religious observance is expected.

At last, the call to prayer rings out from the mosque. Every customer mutters a short prayer and savours the moment of satisfying their parched throats and empty stomachs. Rayyan smiles at all he has around him: a beautiful young family, a well-paid job, and all the benefits of living in a country he believes to be blessed by Allah and governed by a generous Sultan. Once his meal is over, his earlier feelings of lethargy and hunger disappear and are replaced with a brief feeling of satisfaction – a full stomach and another day of fasting completed.

Day 12 – Sunday 2nd April

Whilst the Brunei Malay enjoy material prosperity, Lord, we ask that you would give them an awareness of their spiritual needs, that can only be satisfied by your Gospel of grace.

Day 13 – Monday 3rd April

We pray that the ethnically Chinese Christians who live alongside Brunei Malay would have a desire to reach out to their Muslim neighbours. Fill them with boldness and love to share the hope that they have in you.

Day 14 – Tuesday 4th April

We pray for those who did not complete the full fast today. Lord, bring those who are unable to fulfil their religious duties to a knowledge of the grace found in Jesus.

Day 15 – Wednesday 5th April

We pray for Brunei Malay people that struggle in private with worries they feel they cannot share. Lord, would you lead them to the place where they can cast their cares on you. (Psalm 55:22)

Day 16 – Thursday 6th April

We pray for Southeast Asian Muslims who are overseas this Ramadan, exposed to different cultures and faiths. Father, give them the opportunity to hear and respond to the Gospel.

Day 17 – Friday 7th April

As Muslims in Southeast Asia celebrate the end of another day of fasting, would your Holy Spirit convict them that sin cannot be cancelled out through good works.

Day 18 – Saturday 8th April

We pray for the leaders of countries across Southeast Asia. Lord, reveal yourself to them through visions and dreams, that they might lead their people in truth.

Waiting & Watching for Power

You know... how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

(Acts 10:37-38 NIV)

This week we will be waiting & watching with the 6-8 million Muslims in Thailand. Those who are fasting find that their bodies have adjusted and their minds are turning to the approaching *Laylat al Qadr*, the 'Night of Power'. Muslims believe this will take place on one of the nights during the last ten days of Ramadan and that on that night, their prayers will be answered. This results in an increased intensity of devotion and prayer during those last ten days.

Fatima waves goodbye to her husband, Hassan, as he heads to the mosque to spend the night praying and, sometimes, sleeping. Many of the men and boys in the village will stay overnight at the mosque during these last ten days of Ramadan, and Fatima longs that this year her husband's sincere prayers will be granted because of such devotion. Their long-standing request has been that Allah might grant them the blessing of a child. There are those in the village who say their childlessness is the result of some secret sin, but Fatima tries to ignore them. They have spent much of their money on local healers, amulets, and travelling to pray at the graves of holy men. They had heard that these men of great faith can intercede with Allah on their behalf from the grave. So far, however, none of these attempts have worked. Fatima hopes, more than ever, that on this year's Night of Power, when the gates of Heaven are said to open wide, their fervent prayers will be heard.

Day 19 – Sunday 9th April

Lord, we thank you for your love, compassion and power which has changed our lives. May Muslims across Southeast Asia come to know and experience this for themselves.

Day 20 – Monday 10th April

We pray for Christians living among Thai Muslims. Lord, answer their prayers for the daily needs of those they minister to, demonstrating the love and power of the Gospel of grace.

Day 21 – Tuesday 11th April

Lord, we pray that as Muslims encounter your love and power - through dreams, visions, or answered prayers - they would be drawn into a living relationship with your son.

Day 22 – Wednesday 12th April

Father, we pray for those who feel desperate and rejected through years of unanswered prayers. Have mercy on them and meet them in their deepest needs.

Day 23 – Thursday 13th April

As the last ten days of Ramadan begin, we pray for those spending all night in mosques around Southeast Asia. Lord, reveal yourself to them powerfully.

Day 24 – Friday 14th April

As Heaven's gates are believed to be opened this week, we remember your promise that the gates of Heaven will never be shut and the nations will walk by its light. (Revelation 21:24-25)

Day 25 – Saturday 15th April

Give Christians courage, Lord, to pray for and with Muslim friends, neighbours and colleagues this Ramadan.

Waiting & Watching for renewal

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ,
the new creation has come:
The old has gone, the new is here!

2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV

This week, we are waiting & watching with the Western Cham in Cambodia - a minority Muslim group directly descended from the Southeast Asian Champa Empire which was destroyed in 1400s. They fled to Buddhist-majority Cambodia, where they live to this day, enjoying the right to practice their faith openly and freely. As they fast this week, they will also be preparing for *Eid al-Fitr*, a celebration of the spiritual renewal they believe comes with completing Ramadan.

In a village on the banks of the Mekong river, Samir the tailor sits in his wooden house and sews. This is the busiest time of year for Samir. The sewing machine has been whirring non-stop over the past weeks as folk have made orders for shirts, blouses and long skirts. Across Southeast Asia, Muslim families will begin next week's *Eid* celebrations in matching new clothes, to reflect the fresh start that completing Ramadan offers. Samir is grateful for all the work that *Eid* preparations provide, as it means he can afford to fix up his home to receive the guests that will visit. His wife has already begun cooking curries and cakes, and tomorrow he will buy fresh, new banknotes to give to the children.

Samir is grateful that, God-willing, he will have successfully completed the fast this year. If the month of Ramadan is Allah's way of giving him the chance of a fresh start, Samir will gratefully receive it. Returning to the pile of cloth, Samir is reminded that there is a lot of work still to be done before he is ready for the first day of *Eid* - that special moment when everything should be without stain or wrinkle, as good as new.

Day 26 – Sunday 16th April

Thank you, Lord, for the fresh start that you have made available through Jesus. May news of him spread quickly to the Western Cham and other Muslim minorities across Southeast Asia.

Day 27 – Monday 17th April

We ask, Lord, that you would show Southeast Asian Muslims that being clean and new on the outside means little without inner renewal by the Holy Spirit.

Day 28 – Tuesday 18th April

Today we pray for Cambodian Christians. Lord, help them to overcome fear and be willing to listen and learn from their Muslim neighbours, and so be able to love them better.

Day 29 – Wednesday 19th April

Lord of the harvest, we ask that you would raise up more people who are willing to pray for and serve the Western Cham and other Muslim minority groups across Southeast Asia.

Day 30 – Thursday 20th April

We rejoice that you are drawing people from the Western Cham and other Muslim minorities to yourself. Lord, strengthen their faith amidst the persecution that will inevitably come.

Day 31 – Friday 21st April

Lord, as the last day of fasting takes place across Southeast Asia today, increase our hunger to wait and watch more fervently for your kingdom to come amongst its Muslim peoples.

Waiting & watching for *Forgiveness*

For I will forgive their
wickedness and will remember
their sins no more.

Jeremiah 31:34 NIV



The Rohingya people, having experienced years of religious persecution in their homeland, have sought refuge in countries across Asia and the wider world. This week we are celebrating *Eid al-Fitr* with over a million Rohingya who are living in the world's largest refugee camp. Forgiveness plays an important role during *Eid*, not just divine forgiveness but also forgiveness between fellow human beings. As the Rohingya try to mark the end of Ramadan inside the camp, celebrations are mixed with bitterness and grief. For them, the challenge to forgive is real and raw.

Khadija, a Rohingya Muslim, has no chance of going back home for *Eid al-Fitr* this year, but will celebrate Eid as traditionally as she can in the refugee camp. Back in her home country, her people were not allowed to observe *Eid* publically, but where they are now, they can celebrate with noise and colour within the camp. Khadija's daughters will paint each other's hands with henna and the family will receive charitable food donations. Boys and young men will take the opportunity to party, playing loud techno music from the back of rented pick-up trucks. In whichever ways Khadija and her family celebrate the long-awaited *Eid* holiday today, it will all be done inside the confines of makeshift bamboo walls and dirty alleyways.

Khadijah's favourite part of the *Eid* celebrations has always been visiting extended family and friends. In the refugee camp, houses are cleaned and special foods are prepared to offer to guests. The first thing Muslims do when they meet each other today is to repeat a special greeting that asks for forgiveness for the wrongs they have done to each other, fearing unresolved sin might count against them after they die. If she's honest, Khadijah finds it incredibly difficult to forgive other people for the way they have wronged her. She hopes that God – the Most Gracious and Most Merciful – will be more ready to forgive her sins than she is the sins of others.

Saturday 22nd April – *Eid Mubarak!*

A Prayer for *Eid al-Fitr*

Heavenly Father, we take time today to praise you for your willingness to forgive. We pray for Muslims across Southeast Asia, that they would understand your forgiveness as an undeserved gift, not something that can be earned by good works.

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you that you have made forgiveness possible. Would your life of love and words of truth reach the ears and hearts of all Southeast Asian Muslims.

Holy Spirit, would you comfort those who feel unwanted and unloved this Eid. Transform their lives, so that they might forgive others as they have been forgiven, and inherit an eternal home, which can never be taken from them.

Amen

Now that Ramadan is over...

Start or connect with a local prayer group that meets to pray for Muslims, especially those in Southeast Asia. For more information about online prayer groups praying for Muslims in Southeast Asia email mailbox@howtoprayformuslims.org

Watch information and prayer videos about Southeast Asia and Muslims on the Prayericast website: www.prayericast.com

Invite friends to join you in praying through the 'How to Pray for Muslims' prayer guide, available for download at www.howtoprayformuslims.org

Visit the www.apeopleloved.com for more prayer information about the different Muslim peoples living in Southeast Asia.

Many Muslims fast on Mondays and Thursdays. Why not choose a day of the week when you regularly fast a meal, and instead pray for South East Asia's Muslims?

Recycle this prayer guide – keep using the prayers for Muslims in it throughout the year