A Five Day Prayer Guide
FOR SIKHS DURING VAISAKHI
WHY PRAY FOR SIKHS DURING VAISAKHI?

Every year, more than 28 million Sikhs worldwide celebrate one of their favorite festivals: Vaisakhi. This springtime tradition began nearly four hundred years ago when the last Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh, established a community considered to be pure, committed Sikhs called Khalsa.

The context from which Vaisakhi emerged reflects the long, Sikh struggle to maintain a separate religious and cultural identity from the pluralistic society in which it was born. The Sikh religion and way of life emerged in the overwhelmingly Hindu and Muslim country of India. Gods were multiple or singular. Rituals were important and many. Tensions between religious communities vying to stake their claim in ultimate truth were ever-present and sometimes dangerous.

In the middle of this conflict and absolutism, Guru Gobind Singh established an optional rite of passage for Sikhs to voluntarily dedicate themselves to the Khalsa—a community committed to protecting the Sikh people and religion. Although the original Khalsa community functioned as protective warriors, today Sikhs join the Khalsa as a way to defend their freedoms and ensure equality.

Guru Gobind Singh arranged for this celebration to coincide with springtime festivals of other religions. While Hindus of his day celebrated the end and beginning of the harvest season, Guru Gobind Singh pronounced that Sikhs, too, would have their own harvest festival and distinguish it with the celebration of the Khalsa. Today, this festival is still celebrated by Hindus and Sikhs, with both groups maintaining the name Vaisakhi.

It's our hope that this information would fuel your desire to know, respect, and love Sikhs in a way that opens doors to communicate the gospel. We invite you pray during the five days surrounding the Vaisakhi festival—celebrated this year on April 13—and ask God to move through your prayers and call you into deeper engagement with Sikhs for the sake of the gospel.

*All Scripture translations are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible*
ORIGIN OF SIKHISM

Nanak’s family thought he drowned. The young man had left for the river in northwest India three days earlier to meditate, and he never came home. Just when their hope of his return sank, they spotted Nanak walking toward home from the edge of horizon. He declared to them that he was neither Hindu nor Muslim and that he would spend his life seeking the one true god.

The Sikh religion was born from the young Nanak’s declaration and his subsequent teachings against the caste system. Nanak became Sikhism’s first guru in a line of ten gurus that would span two centuries and perpetuate Guru Nanak’s teachings. The tenth guru closed the Sikh canon by making his own declaration: their holy book, Guru Granth Sahib, would be the final, eternal guru. His statement to Sikhism’s few thousand followers continues to echo in the lives of today’s Sikhs worldwide.

Let’s Pray

Before he died, the tenth Sikh guru initiated Vaisakhi, a festival Sikhs still observe today. Vaisakhi was traditionally the spring harvest festival but soon grew to include a celebration of the Sikh community (see the previous page). Farmers would show their thankfulness for the harvest with a traditional Punjabi folkdance to the beat of their drums. Even today, farmers in Punjab, India, harvest wheat at Vaisakhi time, and Sikhs globally celebrate the start of a new year.

When we hear of a harvest celebration, we remember Jesus’s words to his disciples in Matthew 9:37–38: “The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest.”

- Pray God will use this year’s harvest to illumine his truth that all created things were made by Jesus and for Jesus.
- Pray that as Sikhs celebrate their culture, they will also begin feeling comfortable separating it from their religion.
- Pray God will put believers in the path of Sikhs celebrating the festival and that gospel conversations would begin.
Many Sikhs share five distinctives that symbolize their culture and beliefs:

- Uncut hair that signifies devotion. Sikh men cover their uncut hair with a turban.
- A small comb that symbolizes cleanliness.
- An iron or steel bangle worn on the wrist, symbolizing that there is no beginning or end to reality and that the Sikh is linked to the Guru.
- A sword or dagger that symbolizes the Sikh fight for justice.
- A special undergarment that symbolizes chastity and a self-disciplined lifestyle.

Let’s Pray

Vaisakhi festivities begin early in the morning with a bath, followed by a visit to the Sikh temple for prayers. Sikhs wanting to join the Khalsa often take the amrit sanchar (often translated “baptism” in English) on Vaisakhi.

Baptism for Sikhs is a way for them to “put on” their new role in the Khalsa. But Paul said for all believers, “For as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ like a garment” (Gal. 3:27). Jesus desires to clothe Sikhs in his righteousness, not their own.

- Pray God would use amrit sanchar to point to the picture of death, burial, and resurrection symbolized in believer’s baptism.
- Pray that God would give you an opportunity to meet a Sikh and for you to have boldness to share the testimony behind your own baptism.
- Pray that Sikhs would be moved by the sacrifice Jesus made so that we—sinners—could “put on” his righteousness.

Over time, Sikh doctrine set itself apart from other religions in India. Sikhs believe there is only one god—a god without form, gender, beginning or end. Their holy book begins with the basic statement of belief: “There is one Supreme Being, the Eternal Reality ... never incarnated, self-existent, known by grace through the Guru.”

Sikhs are guided by three main principles that may yield their idea of salvation: lead a disciplined life and meditate on the name of the Guru Nanak/god, earn an honest living and take care of household responsibilities, and engage in community service.
SIKHS IN INDIA: “WHY I’M A SIKH”

Although a religious minority in India, Indian Sikhs boldly share why they are proud to be Sikhs. One said, “I am a Sikh because I was born a Sikh. This is who I am. It is why I wear a turban. I want people to know that I am Sikh.

“I am glad to be Sikh because of the bravery and sacrifice of the Sikh people in our history. Sikhs have always fought against injustice. We have many who sacrificed their lives as martyrs for the right to follow our beliefs. We also have a history of serving in the Indian and the British armies. Sikh soldiers are strong and brave.

“Sikhism teaches that you should not hate any religion. In fact, we believe that if you are Christian, you should strive to be a better Christian, if you are Hindu, you should strive to be a better Hindu, if you are Sikh, you should strive to be a better Sikh. I am proud to be a part of a religion that is known for this.”

Let’s Pray

Vaisakhi may be celebrated with processions through a town while the Sikhs sing hymns. Their holy book is conveyed as the procession’s main focus, preceded by five men who represent the first five men who said they would give their lives for the Sikh community and became the first initiated into the Khalsa. Their bravery, honor, and service to others are truly commendable. Yet we know that only salvation through Christ will create in us a new heart.

Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8–9 that “You are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift—not from works, so that no one can boast.”

- Pray that Sikhs will understand the truth of God’s grace that no person can ever earn.
- Pray for discernment as you share the gospel with Sikhs so you know how to genuinely commend beautiful aspects of their culture while pointing out falsehood in their beliefs about God, sin, and salvation.
- Pray that Christians who encounter Sikhs will be willing to befriend them and to share the love of Jesus.
Day 4  SIKHS IN THE WEST: “GET TO KNOW US”

Over time Sikhs migrated all over the world, many settling in Western countries. Despite Westerners often being confused about who Sikhs are and what they believe, most Sikhs are willing and proud to share about themselves.

One from the UK said, “I was born in the UK, and I am proud to be a Sikh and British. It’s difficult sometimes because despite Sikhs being in this country for decades, some people still think we are Muslim or they have certain stereotypes about my community. That is why I really enjoy when people ask me about myself and try to get to know me. I love sharing my culture and traditions with others. I love discussing why we care about the community and ways we can work together to improve it. Basically, I just want people to know that Sikhs are peaceful people, and if you just get to know us, I think you will agree.”

Let’s Pray

During Vaisakhi celebrations people may demonstrate the incredible Sikh martial art known as Gatka. Gatka fighters use wooden sticks to simulate sword fighting in battle. It is considered both a physical and a spiritual exercise that was intended to train a person to defend himself and his community.

Defending one’s community is honorable; so is peace-keeping, which Sikhs also strive to do. Jesus gives us the ultimate call to peace-keeping through servanthood in his words to the disciples: “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life—a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:26–28).

- Pray for the Sikhs to know the One who came to serve and to give his life as a ransom to save them from their sins.
- Pray that Sikhs living in the West will have Christian friends who will share the good news with them.
- Ask God to give you an opportunity to share how Jesus enables all people to have eternal peace with God.
Day 5

“I FOLLOWED SIKH GURUS. NOW I FOLLOW CHRIST.”

Though Sikh pride in faith and culture keep many from openness to the gospel, some Sikhs find freedom in the life and message of Jesus. One shares, “I grew up in a Sikh family and was baptised into the Khalsa as a young boy. I was very proud to be Sikh. As I got older, I tried very hard to be a good Sikh, but I never felt that I was good enough. I spent some time ignoring religion and searching for happiness in the pleasures of the world. But I still felt empty. I went to religious places and spoke to spiritual teachers. They all told me that I needed to do more good things. I left feeling like it was hopeless.

“Then one of my former teachers told me, ‘You can never be good enough to earn salvation. But Jesus was perfect, and he gave his life as a sacrifice to pay the penalty for all your bad deeds. All you have to do is trust in him.’

“I was angry after hearing this, but it stuck in my mind. I sought out a Christian pastor and began debating with him. One day he asked me to read Revelation 3:20: “Listen, I stand at the door and knock!” That night I felt like Jesus was knocking on the door of my heart. I asked him to come in, and he changed my life.

“I hope many more Sikhs will come to know Jesus as their Savior. Sikhs often meditate on Guru kirpa (god’s grace). I remember asking my mother how to find this grace, but she did not know. I could not find it in Sikhism, but I have found God’s grace in Jesus Christ.”

Let’s Pray

Sikhs often dress in bright colors during Vaisakhi because they represent the spirit of rebirth and sacrifice of the Sikhs. In reality, the vibrant colors cannot reflect the glorious fullness of spiritual rebirth offered in Jesus alone. Jesus’s words to Nicodemus were true when first spoken, and they are fully true for our Sikh friends today: “For God loved the world in this way: he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

- Pray that Sikhs will learn that Jesus is the True Word and is the One who gives grace.
- Pray for the families of Sikh background believers whose families still do not know Jesus.
- Pray that loved ones will see the difference Jesus makes in the life of their family member and also come to follow him.
Every church. Every nation.

Want to learn how to share the gospel with Sikhs? Download our Getting 2 Gospel guide and other resources at imb.org/south-asia.