

Building Up Spiritual Disciplines in 2015: FASTING

Training in Godliness

If we want spiritual transformation, we must actively build up spiritual disciplines. This year, as a 24-7 Prayer Malaysia community, we will focus on building up spiritual disciplines in the following areas:

- Worship and Prayer
- Prayer and Fasting
- Knowledge of the Word of God and teaching
- Action in Justice and Righteousness (Isaiah 58 refers to this as True Fasting)
- The pursuit of holiness

These 5 areas are the most powerful spiritual disciplines of all the Christian disciplines that we need to master in our lives so that Holy Spirit can transform us to be more like Jesus.

In 2 Chronicles 7:14, God's people are told to humble themselves, meaning, to fast and pray with the right motives, with a broken, repentant, and contrite spirit, to seek His face God will hear from heaven and heal our lives, our churches, our communities, our nation and world.

We fast and pray not for ourselves, for our own preservation that we may live comfortable lives, but that God's kingdom will come and His will be done in our nation. We fast and pray for restoration of relationships, renewal of churches, and revival in our communities.

Rev Dr Dion Forster of South Africa once said that the Church deserves the kind of nation it gets, which is a stark reminder to us that an unholy church will get an unholy nation. When we see the deteriorating situation our nation is in, we must not forget that it is a mirror image of what the church is. God is more concerned with the condition of His Church, then the condition of the nation.

If we want to see a change in the direction of our nation, the nations of earth and the fulfillment of the Great Commission, then we must first fast and pray for the Church to be holy and refined as the Bride of Christ. We must first fast and pray to draw closer to Him, that we will pursue holiness, as He is holy. We must begin with ourselves. If we are to stand strong in the coming storm, we must begin with what Paul wrote in his first letter to Timothy in chapter 4 verse 8, which is to train ourselves in godliness.

The 7 Seasons of Prayer and Fasting for 2015

This year, as part our training in godliness, we in 24-7 Prayer Malaysia, will embark on at least seven seasons of prayer which we hope that you will join us, and an additional season for you to pray for us in the 24-7 Prayer Movement:-

2015 SEASONS OF PRAYER OF PRAYER AND FASTING				
No.	Dates	Theme	No. of Days	Purpose
1	Mar 6 – April 4 <i>(Good Friday April 3 Easter April 5)</i>	[LENT – In Solidarity with Mainline Churches] Holiness and Revival	30 Days	Praying for the Church
2	May 1 – June 9 <i>(Gawai and Kaamatan May 31, June 1 -2)</i>	[HARVEST FESTIVAL – In Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples] Holiness and Revival	40 days	Praying for the Indigenous Church
3	June 17 – July 16 <i>(July 17 – Hari Raya Puasa)</i>	[RAMADAN – In Solidarity with the Muslim World] Repentance and Reconciliation	30 Days	Praying for the Muslims
4	July 24 – July 26 <i>(FES Campus 24-7 prayer)</i>	[CAMPUS – In solidarity with FES and Campus Crusade] Holiness and Revival	3 Days	Praying for the Next Generation
5	Aug 7 – Sept 15 <i>(Malaysia Day Sept 16)</i>	[MALAYSIA DAY – In solidarity with NECF] Repentance and Reconciliation	40 Days	Praying for the Nation
6	Oct 1-21 Oct 21 – 31	PERSONAL HOLINESS (Pilgrimage to Prayer Mountain – Mount Murud)	20 Days 10 Days	Praying for the 24-7 Prayer Movement
7	Nov 1 – 30 <i>(Open Doors IDOP Nov 1-30)</i>	[OPEN DOORS IDOP – In solidarity with THE PERSECUTED CHURCH] Standing Strong in the Storm	30 Days	Praying for the Persecuted Nations
8	Dec 3 – 24 <i>(Migrant Day – Dec 3 Prophet Mohamad's Birthday – Dec 24 Christmas – Dec 25)</i>	[ADVENT – In solidarity with Migrants and Refugees, and the Church] Peace and Reconciliation	21 Days	Praying for Migrants and Refugees Praying for the Great Commission to be fulfilled

The Discipline of Fasting

Fasting is the most neglected spiritual discipline. It is a step of faith to build yourself up in this spiritual journey of discipleship in Christ. In today's modern world, fasting is dumbed down to a token act of skipping coffee, chocolates, Facebook or Twitter. God knows our hearts. Let us not deceive ourselves.

The following are some practical ideas on fasting which we will touch on here:-

1. Why Fast?

- a. Fasting was a way of life for all the great prophets and leaders in the Bible. Jesus fasted for 40 days too. Fasting is a biblical way to truly humble ourselves before God (Psalm 35:13; Ezra 8:21). David said, "I humble myself through fasting."

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." – 2 Chronicles 7:14

- b. Fasting and prayer can restore the loss of the "first love" for your Lord and result in a more intimate relationship with Christ. Fasting enables the Holy Spirit to reveal to us our true spiritual condition, which will lead us to in repentance and growing holiness. We will be able to recognize and repent of unconfessed sin. When we fast, even the Word of God becomes more meaningful to us, and will transform our prayer and quiet times into a deeper and authentic experience in Christian discipleship, bringing about a deeper revival in our lives, and as a result, touching others in the process.

2. Who Shouldn't Fast?

- a. Before you begin fasting, make sure you are in good health, not anemic, underweight or having mental health issues. Those who suffer from chronic

illnesses of their vital organs, having ulcers, or are diabetic, are advised not to fast. Please get professional medical advice first so that you can fast safely.

3. **How to Fast?**

- a. There is no perfect formula as to what is the right way to fast. Always remember that fasting is about the condition of the heart, not the number of days. It is not a legalistic way of gaining brownie points with God for good works. It doesn't mean that if you fasted 40 days, that God would be very impressed with you!
- b. If you are fasting for the first time, start slowly. Build up your spiritual muscles so that you will be prepared extended 40-day periods.
- c. A **partial fast** can be found in the book of Daniel. There was a three-week period in which he only abstained from "delicacies," meat, and wine (Daniel 10:3), and only ate vegetables. An water-only fast, or a liquid-only fast (soups and juices only) are also common.
- d. A **total fast** is when you take no food and no water. Paul went on an absolute fast for three days following his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:9). Moses and Elijah engaged in what is considered a supernatural absolute fast of forty days (Deuteronomy 9:9; I Kings 19:8).
- e. If you are planning to fast while you are going about your normal daily business, then a partial fast is advised. You may choose to skip a meal, for example, lunch. If you are going to fast for an extended period, then a soup and juices fast is advisable. Water-only fasts that last for more than several days should only be taken when you are in a state of rest, and under medical supervision because of the extreme danger of over-toxification, breakdown of vital body tissues, and loss of electrolytes.

4. **Physical Preparation Before Fasting**

- a. Begin by eating smaller meals before you abstain altogether. Resist the urge to have that "last big feast" before the fast.
- b. Cutting down on your meals a few days before you begin the fast will signal your mind, stomach, and appetite that less food is acceptable.
- c. Eating raw foods two days before starting the fast and also wean off coffee, tea and sugar products to ease the shock to the body at the early stages of the fast.

5. **Breaking the Fast**

- a. When you fast, your stomach shrinks and your intestines become idle, so solid food must be re-introduced very slowly to avoid kidney failure or digestive distress. Therefore, it is better to end your fast gradually.
- b. After a 40-day fast, carefully transition your body for at least three days before returning to eating meats or normal foods. Allow your body to slowly adjust back to its normal routine.
- c. Don't binge on heavy breakfasts or dinners if you are skipping lunch, as you may also end up quite ill.

6. **Fasting As An Act of Worship**

- a. Stay committed to spending a specific time to devoting yourself to seek His face, focusing on desiring Him alone.
- b. Read His Word and pray during what were previously your mealtimes.
- c. Meditate on Him when you awake in the night.
- d. Sing praises to Him whenever you please. Focus on your Heavenly Father and make every act one of praise and worship. God will enable you to experience His command to "pray without ceasing" and intercede as you seek His presence.

7. Spiritual Warfare During Fasting

- a. Fasting will make you feel irritable, vulnerable and weak. Satan will do everything to discourage and condemn you. Go to God in prayer and ask Him to strengthen your resolve in the face of difficulties and temptations.
- b. The enemy will make you a target when you fast because he doesn't want you to grow in your faith, and will do anything from making you hungry and grumpy to bringing up trouble in your family or at work to stop you. Make prayer your shield against such attacks.

8. Fasting for Revival

- a. Fasting is vital for personal revival, revival for our nation, for the world and for the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Centre your total being on Him. God will honour your commitment to fast in ways that you cannot imagine.

Therefore, when it comes to making your final decision about what type of fast is right for you, start simple and slowly. Follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. He will guide your heart and mind as to what is best for you. Remember, the most important consideration in fasting is your motive. Why are you fasting?