

**FASTING**

**AND**

**PRAYING**

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## Introduction

The Church of Jesus Christ believes and teaches the merits of fasting and prayer. The authors of this pamphlet were assigned the responsibility by the Quorum of Twelve Apostles to write a short treatise on this subject.

The Scriptures are replete on the multiplicity of reasons for fasting and prayer, as well as the various kinds of fasts. The Scripture also points out the great importance that Christ places on fasting and prayer when in Matthew 17:21, He says, "Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." Jesus had just reminded his disciples that if they exercised faith as a grain of mustard seed, they could speak unto the mountain and command it to be removed and it would be removed. He further explains this great power by saying that we could break the barriers of impossibility if we would simply take the positive steps of fasting and prayer.

We can then conclude from the words of Christ that if we discipline ourselves in fasting and prayer, we will be transported to the highest spiritual level known to man.

It is also very important to note that the Apostolic church continued to follow in the teachings of Christ on this subject. The early church fasted and prayed when sending missionaries out into the field of labor. It is recorded in Acts 14:23, "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fast, they commended them to the Lord on whom they had believed."

It is the sincere conviction and fervent prayer of the authors that those who carefully study this article and seek to implement its message will find that their faith and confidence in God will be greatly enhanced.

## Historical Meaning of Fasting and Prayer

Fasting has been practiced by many nations since the creation of the world. Hippocrates, who was called, "the father of medicine," fasted often and taught people to fast. He once wrote, "abstinence and quiet, cure many diseases. The Greeks and Persians were taught by him.

Herodotus, teacher of Hippocrates, taught that fasting and exercise, were of greater value to one's body and health than drugs and medicine.

Tertullian, the great historian, wrote in AD 210 that fasting was a better aid than feasting. Polycarp, the great early martyr, said in AD 110 that fasting was a powerful aid against temptation and fleshly lusts.

Socrates and Plato fasted often and taught the Greek nation the physical benefits of fasting. Fasting was also common among the Egyptians, Druids, Armenians, Arabs and Ethiopians. Fasting was likewise found among the people of Alaska and the American Indians in their worship. Moreover, fasting was a custom advocated by the school

of philosophers for curative purposes for over 2,000 years. Plutarch stated that instead of using medicine, "fast."

Traces of fasting have been found in Hindu and Chinese writings. Fasting is one of the four pillars in the Mohammedan religion. This explains why there is so much zeal and fervor in their religion. Fervor and zeal are definitely a result of the fast. Prayer is mentioned in the Scripture far more frequently than the practice of fasting; however, it is a powerful spiritual tool none the less. Fasting was accepted and practiced by holy men of God since the creation of the world. The Church of Jesus Christ recommends fasting and prayer as the vehicles through which spiritual and physical benefits may be obtained from the Lord.

### **Physical and Natural Reasons for Fasting**

Fasting serves the purpose of cleansing the body as well as permitting a balancing of the circulation, which is absolutely essential to good health. It can be said that fasting is a "house cleaning" for the natural body.

There are four means of "house cleaning":

1. The Skin: The pores are one channel by which toxic wastes are eliminated. Far more wastes are eliminated during fast through the pores than at any other time.
2. The Kidneys: This is why drinking water is so highly beneficial. It dilutes the urine which constantly washes out the poisons that are poured into the kidneys.
3. The Lungs: These organs play an important part in this house cleaning project. Loads of poisons are exhaled in the fast through the nostrils from oxygenation of blood. The same amount of poison is released through the nostrils and lungs as through the kidneys, intestines and skin.
4. The Intestines: These are a fourth channel of elimination of poisons.

Fasting does not reduce, but increases energy and heat of the body. It also gives the body a much needed "holiday" or "vacation." The body seldom ever has a rest from ordinary labors. Improper living, eating, drinking and thinking result in overtaxing and overloading of the organs of the body. One would do well to grant the millions of little cells in our body a rest. The Lord rested on the seventh day from His labors; yet we do not even give our body a sabbatical rest.

With the physical house cleaning goes a mental house cleaning as well. Many times, pessimism, gloom, discouragement, anger, grudges, worry and mental tensions disappear after bodily purification takes place. Bernard McFadden, health authority says, "The body intimately influences the higher soul powers during a fast."

## Various Kinds of Fasting

### 1. *Fasting without Food:*

There is a fast where some people stay without any kind of food for days. However, they drink water from time to time. Some people can fast for days by drinking water alone and no food. Medical science claims that no person can stay without water for very long, as the human body needs water more than solid foods. To fast then, for forty days and forty nights as Moses and Jesus did, must be termed a miraculous type of fasting.

### 2. *Partial Fast:*

There is also a "partial" fast, that is, when a person abstains only from certain kinds of food. Daniel the prophet said,

Daniel 10:3:

"I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth . . . "

Daniel and the three Hebrew children, Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego refused to eat the king's rich food, but rather asked for pulse and water. This could be termed a "partial" fast. Something akin to partial fasting is seen when Elijah partook of simple cakes made from meal and oil at the house of the widow Zaraphath (I Kings Chapter 17). Was Elijah exercising a "partial" fast?

### 3. *Absolute Fast:*

When Saul of Tarsus was led into Damascus blind, he "was three days without sight, neither did eat or drink" (Acts 9:9). Ezra spent the "night, neither eating bread nor drinking water; for he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles" (Ezra 10:6). Esther instructed Mordecai to "hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do" (Esther 4:16). Moses and Jesus Christ fasted for forty days and forty nights in absolute fastings. These can certainly be considered as examples of miraculous fasts.

## Duration of a Fast

Most often, the fasts in the Bible lasted only one entire day (24 hours). They started from sunset the first day until sunset the following day. A person would not eat the evening meal after the sun went down nor would he eat throughout the following day until sunset. They would abstain from all food. This was not a rule nor a law but a tradition.

Judges 20:26:

"Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the Lord, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord."

I Samuel 14:24:

"And the men of Israel were distressed that day; for Saul had adjured the people, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies. So none of the people tasted any food."

II Samuel 1:12:

"And they mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the Lord, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword."

II Samuel 3:35:

"And when all the people came to cause David to eat meat while it was yet day, David sware, saying, So do God to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or ought else, till the sun be down."

Daniel 6:18:

"Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of music brought before him: and his sleep went from him."

### **WHEN IT IS NOT ADVISABLE TO FAST**

The king fasted all night because of his love for Daniel who faced the perils of the lion's den. He did not fast longer than the next morning after he knew that Daniel was out of danger.

Esther called for a fast of three days and three nights because Israel faced extinction.

Esther 4:16:

"Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish."

The Bible does not specify how many hours, days or weeks or any length of time a person should fast because there are also certain dangers associated with fasting if the person is not physically able to fast.

### **When It Is Not Advisable to Fast**

The duration of a fast should be determined by the individual. Some are physically able to fast longer than others. God will answer a request according to a person's sincere desire.

Nursing mothers, diabetics taking insulin, people with terminal illnesses, gout, blood disease, heart disease, tumors, cancer, bleeding ulcers, liver and kidney disease, should not participate in any extended fast except under medical advice or supervision.

## **FASTING IN THE CONTEXT OF MARRIAGE**

### **Fasting Cleanses the Mind As Well As the Body**

Fasting is not merely abstaining from food. Fasting involves prayer, repentance, sincerity and the searching of one's soul. There must also be a spiritual purpose if it is to be a testimony to God.

Both in the Old and New Testaments, we see the same self-denial and consecration on the part of the Holy men of God who afflicted their souls in fasting and prayer.

Sincere fasting produces the renewing of the mind as well as a revival of one's spirit. It helps to achieve a more spiritual level of righteous living. For example, fasting helps to remove evil thoughts, pride, jealousy, malice, greed and lust. Fasting helps people become more merciful and forgiving.

Philippians 2:5:

"Let this mind be in you, which is also in Christ Jesus."

The benefits and blessings that are brought about through fasting and praying are necessary for one's spiritual growth.

### **Fasting in the Context of Marriage**

Now to the married, the Apostle Paul spoke about the relationship between husband and wife when either one or both are going to fast and pray.



I Corinthians 7:5:

"Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency."

He speaks on this subject and gives counsel as a help to one's marital situation. In such abstinence both husband and wife should mutually agree.

The Apostle Paul did not mean that it was a sin to indulge their sexual needs when either one or both were fasting. He meant that greater spiritual results would be obtained if both could retain a spiritual mind during their fast and not yield to carnality for a time. This is simply a test of self-denial, the spirit mastering the flesh.

### **Spiritual Reasons for Fasting**

Fasting in Hebrew: "Sum" to cover the mouth. Fasting in Greek: NESTEVO to abstain. Fasting in English (Webster): Fasting to abstain from food.

When men could not reach God nor gain his favor nor could they perform the mighty deeds that God had commanded them and prayer alone was insufficient, they then would cry out to God in fasting and prayer, afflicting their souls. There are times when one's spirit is at a low ebb and it needs reinforcement. The spirit needs a revival; reading the scriptures, praying and meditating is sometimes not enough. We must, therefore, extend ourselves further in the act of fasting and prayer. We may ask ourselves, what are the reasons for fasting and prayer? Let us now look at some of these reasons.

1. Fasting to obtain answers from God.
2. Fasting to receive more of His Holy Spirit in order that we might become more spiritual.
3. Fasting to obtain spiritual gifts.
4. Fasting to receive a greater portion of God's pure love (charity).
5. Fasting to increase our faith when prayer alone is not sufficient.
6. Fasting for forgiveness.
7. Fasting for healing.
8. Fasting in thanksgiving when prayers are answered.
9. Fasting to increase humility.
10. Fasting when associated with mourning.

11. Fasting for greater righteousness.
12. Fasting for the souls of men and women.
13. Fasting before ordaining ministers.
14. Fasting in the creative work of mission fields.
15. Fasting in the face of public calamities or approaching danger.
16. Fasting to rebuke the devil and his demons.

### **Scriptures to Substantiate the Reasons for Fasting**

#### *(1) Fasting to Obtain Answers from God:*

Cornelius, the first Gentile to be baptized in the early Church received a vision from the Lord directing him to send for Peter. When Peter arrived and asked Cornelius why he had sent for him, his reply was,

Acts 10:30-33:

"And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are com manded thee of God."

*Other Scriptures:*

Acts 13:2:

"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."

### **SCRIPTURES TO SUBSTANTIATE THE REASONS FOR FASTING**

III Nephi 27:1-3:

"And it came to pass that as the disciples of Jesus were journeying and were preaching the things which they had both heard and seen, and were baptizing in the name of Jesus, it came to pass that the disciples were

gathered together and were united in mighty prayer and fasting. And Jesus again showed himself unto them, for they were praying unto the Father in his name; and Jesus came and stood in the midst of them, and said unto them: What will ye that I shall give unto you? And they said unto him: Lord, we will that thou shouldst tell us the name whereby we shall call this church; for there are disputations among the people concerning this matter."

*(2) Fasting to Receive More of His Holy Spirit and to Increase One's Spirituality:*

Becoming more spiritual means to become more humble, more lowly, more dedicated; and this certainly entails more self-denial and more sacrifice on our part.

Fasting is a divine remedy to the pride of the human heart. It is recorded in the Book of Mormon that the Sons of Mosiah fasted much and prayed much that the Lord would grant unto them a portion of His Spirit to go with them that they might be an instrument in the hands of God.

Alma 5:46-47:

"Behold, I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me. And moreover, I say unto you that it has thus been revealed unto me, that the words which have been spoken by our fathers are true, even so according to the spirit of prophecy which is in me, which is also by the manifestation of the Spirit of God."

Alma 17:3-9:

"But this is not all; they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting; therefore they had the spirit of prophecy; and the spirit of revelation, and when they taught they taught with power and authority of God. And they had been teaching the word of God for fourteen years among the Lamanites, having had much success in bringing many to the knowledge of the truth; yea, by the power of their words many were brought before the altar of God, to call on his name and confess their sins before him. Now these are the circumstances which attended them in their journeyings, for they had many afflictions; they did suffer much, both in body and in mind, such as hunger, thirst and fatigue, and also much labor in the spirit. Now these were their journeyings: Having taken leave of their father, Mosiah, in the first year of the judges; having refused the kingdom which their father was desirous to confer upon them, and also this was the minds of the people; Nevertheless they departed out of the land of Zarahemla, and took their swords, and their spears, and their bows, and their arrows, and their slings; and this they did that they might provide food for themselves while in the wilderness. And thus they departed into the wilderness with their

numbers which they had selected, to go up to the land of Nephi, to preach the word of God unto the Lamanites. And it came to pass that they journeyed many days in the wilderness, and they fasted much and prayed much that the Lord would grant unto them a portion of his Spirit to go with them, and abide with them, that they might be an instrument in the hands of God to bring, if it were possible, their brethren the Lamanites, to the knowledge of the truth, to the knowledge of the baseness of the traditions of their fathers, which were not correct."

*(3) Fasting to Obtain More Spiritual Gifts:*

If one wants to be enriched with gifts from the Almighty, one has to dedicate himself by fasting and prayer that God might open the great storehouse of gifts which He holds in reserve for those who desire them.

Fasting to obtain gifts from the Almighty is necessary that the Saints might exhibit the blessings of God by the demonstration of the gifts which He will bestow to those who sincerely seek them for the glory of Christ and not for personal reasons.

*(4) Fasting to Receive a Greater Portion of God's Love (Charity):*

We must seek after a greater portion of God's love. This can be accomplished through fasting and prayer.

I Corinthians 13: 1-8, 13:

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three, but the greatest of these is charity."

Moroni 7:46,48:

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest

of all, for all things must fail. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen."

*(5) Fasting to Increase Our Faith when Prayer Alone Is Not Sufficient:*

Fasting removes unbelief and is the greatest faith producer.

Matthew 17:20-21:

"And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."

Fasting is one of the surest ways for obtaining spiritual success. One's natural appetites are placed in a dormant condition; thus physical pleasures are not enjoyed with pleasurable appetites. God can come near to us and we hear Him. He is contacted and a revival begins. The flesh becomes neutralized so that the individual is now a conductor of spiritual power. The strongholds of the flesh are pulled down so that faith has no real barriers.

II Corinthians 10:3,4:

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds:)"

Fasting helps us to separate right from wrong so that we will not listen to the negative messages that our senses may bring forth.

Ezra 8:21-23:

"Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was entreated of us."

Matthew 17:14-21

"And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer with you? bring him hither to me. And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."

(6) *Fasting for Forgiveness:*

When one recognizes that sin and transgression has entered into one's heart, fasting and prayer is often self-imposed to obtain forgiveness.

I Samuel 7:6:

"And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh."

Jonah 3:3-10:

"So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. And Jonah began to enter the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drinkwater: But let man and beast be covered with sack cloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them tum every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will tum and repent, and tum from his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not."

Joel 2: 12-17:

"Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the Lord your God? Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breast: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them ... "

Nehemiah 9:1-3:

"Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the Lord their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the Lord their God."

Psalms 25:7,11,18:

"Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O Lord. For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great. Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins."

Daniel 9:3-5:

"And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: And I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confessions, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments "

Acts 9:9:

"And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink."

*(7) Fasting for Healing:*

Ofttimes fasting is required when there are afflictions of the body or mental distresses. God is humbly sought in fasting and prayer that His arm would be extended in behalf of the sick whether it be for one's own needs or for others.

When prayer alone seems to be inadequate in times of afflictions, then one combines fasting with prayer to bring about the healing of the sick.

David fasted for the sickness of the child that was born to him of Bathsheba.

II Samuel 12: 16, 17:

"David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth. (17) And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them."

*(8) Fasting in Thanksgiving after Prayers Are Answered:*

One is quick to seek God out in prayer and fasting when confronted with the crisis of life. Why then should not one be just as quick to thank Him in fasting and prayer when one has been delivered by His mighty hand?

Alma 45:1:

"Behold, now it came to pass that the people of Nephi were exceedingly rejoiced, because the Lord had again delivered them out of the hands of their enemies; therefore they gave thanks unto the Lord their God; yea, and they did fast much and pray much, and they did worship God with exceeding great joy."

*(9) Fasting to Increase Humility:*

Humility is greatly to be desired and is the mark of a great man. Moses, who was called, "the meekest man in all the earth," rose to great heights when he asked God to remove his name out of the Book of Life rather than to destroy Israel. There is no doubt that his humility came as a result of his much fasting and praying.

Psalms 35:13:

"But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom."

Helaman 3:35:



"Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God."

(10) *Fasting as It Is Associated with Mourning:*

Fasting has in all ages and among all nations been an exercise much in use in times of bereavement and mourning. Also, Christ taught us that:

Matthew 5:4:

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."

*Other Scriptural References:*

I Samuel 31: 12, 13:

"All the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Bethshan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days."

Nehemiah 1 :4:

"And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven "

Daniel 10:2-3:

"In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled."

Alma 28:4-6:

"And now this was a time that there was a great mourning and lamentation heard throughout all the land, among all the people of Nephi- (5) Yea, the cry of widows mourning for their husbands, and also of fathers mourning for their sons, and the daughter for the brother, yea, the brother for the brother, yea, the brother for the father; and thus the cry of mourning was heard among all of them, mourning for their kindred who had been slain. (6) And now surely this was a sorrowful day; yea, a time of solemnity, and a time of much fasting and prayer."

Alma 30:2:

"Now their dead were not numbered because of the greatness of their numbers; neither were the dead of the Nephites numbered-but it came to pass after they had buried their dead, and also after the days of fasting, and mourning, and prayer, (and it was in the sixteenth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi) there began to be continual peace throughout all the land."

Helaman 9: 10:

"And it came to pass that on the morrow the people did assemble themselves together to mourn and to fast, at the burial of the great chief judge who had been slain."

*(11) Fasting for Greater Righteousness:*

Fasting helps us to become more righteous because it is a denial of feeding the carnal man. Jesus said, "We must deny ourself, take up our cross and follow him." Also, we must understand that in hungering and thirsting after righteousness, we are feeding the spirit and not the flesh.

Matthew 5:6:

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

III Nephi 12:6:

"And blessed are all they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost."

IV Nephi 1: 12, 13, 15:

"And they did not walk any more after the performances and ordinances of the law of Moses; but they did walk after the commandments which they had received from their Lord and their God, continuing in fasting and prayer, and in meeting together oft both to pray and to hear the word of the Lord. And it came to pass that there was no contention among all the people, in all the land; but there were mighty miracles wrought among the disciples of Jesus. And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people."

Moroni 6:5:

"And the church did meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls."

*(12) Fasting for the Souls of Men and Women:*

When we experience great difficulty in bringing souls to Christ, the scriptures teach us that we must cry out to God in mighty fasting and prayer.

Acts 13:2,3:

"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. (3) And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."

Alma 6:6:

"Nevertheless the children of God were commanded that they should gather themselves together oft, and join in fasting and mighty prayer in behalf of the welfare of the souls of those who knew not God."

Alma 8:26:

"And now, Amulek, because thou has fed me and taken me in, thou art blessed; for I was an hungered, for I had fasted many days."

Alma 10:7:

"As I was journeying to see a very near kindred, behold an angel of the Lord appeared unto me and said: Amulek, return to thine own house, for thou shalt feed a prophet of the Lord; yea, a holy man, who is a chosen man of God; for he has fasted many days because of the sins of this people, and he is an hungered, and thou shalt receive him into thy house and feed him, and he shall bless thee and thy house; and the blessing of the Lord shall rest upon thee and thy house."

*(13) Fasting before Ordaining Ministers:*

The Scriptures state that there were occasions when the Church fasted and prayed for guidance before ordaining ministers.

Acts 14:23:

"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed."

*(14) Fasting in the Creation of Missionary Fields:*

Fasting in the creation of mission fields purifies the soul and cleanses the spirit so that the Holy Spirit might have full sway in one's heart and mind; and the work ahead will be crowned with the blessings of God.

Matthew 4 :2:

"And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred."

Acts 13:2,3:

"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."

Alma 17:3:

"But this is not all; they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting; therefore they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and when they taught, they taught with power and authority of God."

*(15) Fasting in the Face of Public Calamities and Impending Dangers:*

There are times when public calamities overtake a nation and it is faced with imminent dangers that fasting and praying before the Lord moves His mighty hand.

Esther 4:14-16:

"For if thou altogether boldest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish."

Joel 1: 14:

"Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry unto the Lord."

II Chronicles 20:3:

"And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast through out all of Judah."

*(16) Fasting to Rebuke the Devil and His Demons:*

Jesus told His disciples that if they would resist the devil, he would flee from them. He also told them that if they would exercise faith along with fasting and prayer, they would have the power to rebuke the devil.

We, as the Church in our day and time, should be very concerned with the growing menace of Satanic worship. This evil spirit should move us to spend much time in fasting and prayer, asking God for more of His power to rebuke the devil and all his demons.

In the following scripture, Jesus tells us that we have the right and power to rebuke the devil, however, in order to do this, we must remove from our life all shades of unbelief. This type of discipline Jesus said can be accomplished through fasting and prayer.

Matthew 17:18-21:

"And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."

### **How to Break a Fast**

When persons desire to close their fast, it should be done in thankful prayer before God.

If a person has fasted for a long time, it is important that the body is not filled with rich foods, because the body may not stand the shock and, in all probability, a person could become ill.

After an extended fast, the next two or three meals should be very light in order to give the body some rest and time to recover its normal functions.

### **Spiritual Benefits of Fasting and Praying (Summary)**

Spiritual benefits of fasting and praying can be summed up as follows:

1. Fasting is a discipline of the body to humble the soul.
2. Fasting helps to prevail in prayer with God.
3. Fasting and praying will bring mercy from God.
4. Fasting and praying will free us from the weaknesses of the flesh.
5. Fasting and praying will give us power over Satan.
6. Fasting and praying will reveal the Will of God for individuals and for the Church.
7. Fasting and praying helps produce the fruits of the Holy Spirit in one's life.
8. Fasting will produce greater love in our hearts for others.
9. Believers are expected to fast and pray.

Luke 5:34,35:

"And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days."

### **Theological Reflections**

The benefits and blessings brought about through fasting and praying are necessary for one's spiritual growth. A spiritual maturity is gained through this medium. Fasting and praying are indivisible as the body and soul; they cannot be separated; they are intertwined one with the other, an interwoven texture of sublime spirituality. Usually one finds the capacity to pray more fervently while fasting. Something beautiful happens when fasting and praying in humility before the Lord. From the innermost depth of the heart there arise words of praise and honor to God.

Fasting has to be exercised with a positive attitude; looking to the benefits derived from it. Jesus Christ exhorted His disciples to practice His teachings in a positive manner, never in a negative one. He did not say, "If you pray" but "When you pray." Nor did He say, "If you give alms" but "When you give alms." He left no doubts in the minds of His disciples that all of His teachings were to be practiced in a positive and spiritual manner.

Being void of natural foods, when fasting, gives the mind and the spirit freedom from unwanted encroachments, thereby opening the door for divine responses.

There is also a fast which transcends the mere abstinence from food; it is called "God's chosen fast." It is written:

Isaiah 58:6-9

Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward. Then shall thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry and he shall say, Here I am. . . . "

No superlative adjectives can describe or extol the benefits resulting from fasting and praying; for in depriving oneself from food in order to reach the Lord, one also praises the Almighty to whom belongs all honor and glory. Amen.

## **Applications**

There are four elements in the acts of fasting and prayer. ie., How, why, where, and when.

### *1. How*

A person must apply oneself to fasting and prayer with sincerity, humility and determination. One must approach the Lord with faith, believing that the offering which is made will reach His throne. There must not be any doubt in one's mind whether God can (or will) answer. A surrendering of one's will to the will of God is of the utmost importance in the act of fasting and praying.

### *2. When*

One must approach God in fasting and prayer when a crisis arises for the individual or a collective group. It could be losing weight for health's sake. It could be for one's own affliction, for another's affliction, when there is approaching danger such as rumors of war, earthquakes, hurricanes, etc. Fasting and prayer can be initiated prior to ordinations (as alluded to in this article) of not only Elders, but also of Apostles, Evangelists, Teachers, Deacons, and Deaconesses.

There are times when it is necessary and urgent to fast and pray. However, the cause must be important and specific.

### 3. *Where*

Fasting can take place in one's own house, in someone else's house, in a place of worship, at work, on a mountain, or in a forest glade. The Scriptures are replete with instances where individuals and/or collective groups fasted and prayed. Jesus, Moses, et al fasted on the mountain; Abraham's servant fasted on his journey seeking a bride for Isaac; Hannah fasted and prayed in the house of God; Ezra and his people fasted at the river Ahava; and Anna fasted in the Temple.

The list is very extensive regarding where people fasted and prayed. The place where one fasts is not of the utmost importance; it is the sincerity and determination to get divine response that is vital.

### 4. *Why*

"Why" is an age-old question regarding a multitude of things which baffle human beings. The reason for asking "why" is because the answers are often elusive as a "will o' the wisp." Answers to intangibles have been sought by human beings since the creation of the world. No less is "why fast and pray?"

While no one can really understand or give a satisfactory answer as to why prayer alone is sometimes insufficient, and the soul must be afflicted, the heart humbled, and tears shed profusely in fasting, it suffices to know that Jesus Christ said that, "This kind doth not go out but by prayer and fasting." Although Jesus referred to the casting out of demons, it is logical to assume that when crises arise which appear insurmountable, depriving one's body of food for a period of time is a very small price to pay in exchange for the benefits that are received.

## **Conclusion**

The authors humbly pray that this article, as it is perused carefully, will convey the importance of fasting and prayer and the spiritual enrichment the reader will derive from participating in this act.

The Church of Jesus Christ urges all of its members to engage in fasting and prayer as a vehicle whereby the hand of the Almighty will be moved in their behalf. The authors also urge the Saints to fast and pray for the spiritual development of the Church and its prophetic fulfillment of Isaiah and Micah wherein it will become the "Mountain of the Lord's house, established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it" (Isaiah 2:2-5, Micah 4:1-5).



## Biblical References to Full and Partial Fasting

The following are some references of full or partial fasting:

### *OLD TESTAMENT*

Genesis 24:33	Abraham's servant seeking a bride for Isaac.
Exodus 34:28	Moses' first period of forty days on Sinai.
Lev. 16:29,31	On the day of Atonement.
Lev. 23:14	Until the sheaf of wave offering was offered.
Judges 20:26	Israel after their defeat by Benjamin.
I Samuel 1 :7,8	Hannah's prayer for a child.
I Samuel 20:34	Jonathan grieved at Saul's hatred for David.
I Samuel 31:13	By those that buried Saul and his sons
II Samuel 1:12	By David and his men at the news of Saul's death
II Samuel 3:35	By David at Abner's death.
II Samuel 11:11	Uriah's self-discipline in time of battle.
II Samuel 12: 16-23	David for the child of Bathsheba.
I Kings 13:8-24	By prophet who cried against the altar of Bethel.
I Kings 17	Elijah's restricted diet.
I Kings 19:8	Elijah on his journey to Horeb.
I Kings 21:4,5	By Ahab after Naboth's refusal.
I Kings 21:9-12	When Naboth was set on high at Jezebel's instigation.
I Kings 21:27	By Ahab in self humiliation.
II Chron. 20:3	Proclaimed by Jehoshaphat before battle.
Ezra 8:21-23	Proclaimed by Ezra at River Ahava.
Ezra 9:5	Ezra mourning for the faithlessness of the exiles.
Nehemiah 1:4	By Nehemiah for the restoration of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 9: 1	By people of Jerusalem, confessing their sins.
Esther 4:3	By the Jews following Haman's decree.
Esther 4:16	Called by Esther before audience with the king.
Esther 9:31	In connection with the feast of Purim.
Job 33:19,20	As a result of pain or sickness.
Psalms 35:13	David on behalf of others who were sick.
Psalms 42:3	When the Psalmist's tears became his food.
Psalms 69:10	The cause of David being reproached.
Psalms 102:4	The Psalmist forgets food in his affliction.
Psalms 109:24	The cause of David's physical weakness.
Isaiah 58	The kind of fasting pleasing to God.
Jeremiah 14:12	That which is unacceptable to God.
Jeremiah 36:6,9	Baruch reading Jeremiah's scroll on a fast day.
Daniel 1:12-16	Daniel and his companions refuse the king's food.
Daniel 6:18	Darius when Daniel was in the lion's den.
Daniel 9:3	Daniel praying for Jerusalem.
Daniel 10:2,3	Daniel's three weeks partial fast.
Joel 1:14	In view of the day of the Lord.
Joel 2:12	Proclaimed by blowing a trumpet in Zion.
Jonah 3:5-9	Proclaimed by the people and King of Nineveh.
Zechariah 7:3-5	With mourning in the fifth and seventy months.

*NEW TESTAMENT*

Matthew 4:2	By our Lord for forty days.
Matthew 6:16-18	Not to be practiced as the hypocrites do.
Matthew 9:14,15	By John's disciples and the Pharisees.
Matthew 9:15	By the guests when the bridegroom has departed.
Matthew 11:18	The abstemious character of John the Baptist.
Matthew 15:32	State of the four thousand before Jesus fed them.
Mark 9:29	This kind only come forth by fasting.
Luke 2:37	By Anna worshipping in the Temple.
Luke 4:2	By our Lord for forty days.
Luke 18:12	By the boastful Pharisees, twice a week.
Acts 9:9	Saul of Tarsus after his encounter with Christ.
Acts 10:30	By Cornelius when an angel appeared to him.
Acts 13:2,3	By prophets and teachers in Antioch.
Acts 14:23	At the appointment of Elders in the churches.
Acts 23:12-21	By Jews under an oath to kill Paul.
Acts 27:9	Allusion to the annual day of Atonement.
Acts 27:21,33	By those with Paul before the shipwreck.
I Corinthians 7:5	In the marriage relationship.
II Corinthians 6:5	An ingredient of the Apostolic ministry.
II Corinthians 11:27	In the list of Paul's sufferings.
I Timothy 4:3	False teachers commanding abstinence.

*BOOK OF MORMON*

Alma 27:22,23	Alma and his people fasting for Alma's son.
Alma 5:46	Alma to receive revelation from God.
Alma 8:26	Alma fed by Amulek after fasting many days.
Alma 10:7	Amulek told by God to feed Alma who had been fasting.
Alma 17:3	Sons of Mosiah for the spirit of prophecy and revelation.
Alma 17:9	Sons of Mosiah that God might go with them.
Alma 28:6	Nephites mourning over the loss in battle.
Alma 30:2	Nephites mourning for their dead.
III Nephi 27:1-8	Disciples asking by what name the Church should be called.
IV Nephi 1:12	People fast in righteousness.
Moroni 6:5	Church fasts often.