

The Law of the Fast

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My beloved brethren and sisters, I feel as you do that Elder David B. Haight is an inspiration to the entire Church and so many others.

Two thousand years ago, upon the sand and stones of Galilee walked a man that few recognized for who He truly was: the Creator of worlds, the Redeemer, the Son of God.

A lawyer approached Him and asked, "What is the greatest commandment?"

Jesus answered: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

"This is the first and great commandment.

"And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

"On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."¹

Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord has established His Church once again among men. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, restored to the earth in these latter days, is centered on those commandments the Savior proclaimed as the greatest: to love our Heavenly Father and to love our fellowmen. Our Savior said, "If thou lovest me thou shalt serve me and keep all my commandments."² One way we show our love is through observance of the law of the fast. This law is based upon a primary yet profound principle—a simple practice—that, if observed with the proper spirit, will help us draw closer to our Heavenly Father and strengthen our

faith, while at the same time help us ease the burdens of others.

In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, members are encouraged to fast whenever their faith needs special fortification and to fast regularly once each month on fast day. On that day, we go without eating or drinking for two consecutive meals, commune with our Heavenly Father, and contribute a fast offering to help the poor. The offering should be at least equal to the value of the food that would have been eaten. Typically, the first Sunday of each month is designated as fast Sunday. On that day, members who are physically able are encouraged to fast, pray, bear witness to the truthfulness of the gospel, and pay a generous fast offering. "The law of the fast," taught Elder Milton R. Hunter, "is probably as old as the human family. . . . In ancient times, prophet-leaders repeatedly gave to church members the commandment to observe the law of fasting and praying."³

We observe that in the scriptures, fasting almost always is linked with prayer. Without prayer, fasting is not complete fasting; it's simply going hungry. If we want our fasting to be more than just going without eating, we must lift our hearts, our minds, and our voices in communion with our Heavenly Father. Fasting, coupled with mighty prayer, is powerful. It can fill our minds with the revelations of the Spirit. It can strengthen us against times of temptation.

Fasting and prayer can help develop within us courage and confidence. It can strengthen our character and build self-restraint and discipline. Often when we fast, our righteous prayers and petitions have

greater power. Testimonies grow. We mature spiritually and emotionally and sanctify our souls. Each time we fast, we gain a little more control over our worldly appetites and passions.

Fasting and prayer can help us in our families and in our daily work. They can help us magnify our callings in the Church. President Ezra Taft Benson taught: "If you want to get the spirit of your office and calling as a new president of a quorum, a new high [councilor], a new bishop [or, I might say, a Relief Society president]—try fasting for a period. I don't mean just missing one meal, then eating twice as much the next meal. I mean really fasting, and praying during that period. It will do more to give you the real spirit of your office and calling and permit the Spirit to operate through you than anything I know."⁴

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught: "Let this be an [example] to all saints, and there will never be any lack for bread: When the poor are starving, let those who have, fast one day and give what they otherwise would have eaten to the bishops for the poor, and every one will abound for a long time. . . . And so long as the saints will all live to this principle with glad hearts and cheerful countenances they will always have an abundance."⁵

Book of Mormon prophets taught the law of the fast: "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 exceedingly great joy."⁶

The powerful combination of fasting and prayer is exemplified by the four sons of Mosiah. They faced overwhelming odds, yet worked miracles in bringing thousands of the Lamanites to a knowledge of the truth. They shared the secret of their success. They "searched the scriptures" and "they had given themselves to much prayer and fasting." What was the result? "They had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and when they taught, they taught with power and authority of God."⁷

When we fast, brethren and sisters, we feel hunger. And for a short time, we literally put ourselves in the position of the hungry and the needy. As we do so, we have greater understanding of the deprivations they might feel. When we give to the bishop an offering to relieve the suffering of others, we not only do something sublime for others, but we do something wonderful for ourselves as well. King Benjamin taught that as we give of our substance to the poor, we retain "a remission of [our] sins from day to day."⁸

Another Book of Mormon prophet, Amulek, explained that often our prayers have no power because we have turned our backs on the needy.⁹ If you feel that Heavenly Father is not listening to your petitions, ask yourself if you are listening to the cries of the poor, the sick, the hungry, and the afflicted all around you.

Some look at the overwhelming need in the world and think, *What can I do that could possibly make a difference?*

I will tell you plainly one thing you can do. You can live the law of the fast and contribute a generous fast offering.

Fast offerings are used for one purpose only: to bless the lives of those in need. Every dollar given to the bishop as a fast offering goes to assist the poor. When donations exceed local needs, they are passed along to fulfill the needs elsewhere.

As an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, I have traveled the world testifying of Him. I come before you today to bear another witness—a witness to the suffering and need of millions of our Heavenly Father's children. Far too many in the world today—thousands upon thousands of families—experience want each day. They hunger. They ache with cold. They suffer from sickness. They grieve for their children. They mourn for the safety of their families. These people are not strangers and foreigners but children of our Heavenly Father. They are our brothers and our sisters. They are "fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God."¹⁰ Their fervent prayers ascend to heaven pleading for respite, for relief from suffering. At this very hour on this very day, some members even in our Church are praying for the miracle that would allow them to surmount the suffering that surrounds them. If, while we have the means to do so, we do not have compassion for them and spring to their aid, we are in danger of being among those the prophet Moroni spoke of when he said, "Behold, ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel . . . more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted."¹¹

How well I remember my father, the bishop of our ward, filling my small red wagon with food and clothing and then directing me—as a deacon in the Church—to pull the wagon behind me

and visit the homes of the needy in our ward.

Often, when fast-offering funds were depleted, my father would take money from his own pocket to supply the needy in his flock with food that would keep them from going hungry. Those were the days of the Great Depression, and many families were suffering.

I remember visiting one family in particular: a sickly mother, an unemployed and discouraged father, and five children with pallid faces, all disheartened and hungry. I remember the gratitude that beamed in their faces when I walked up to their door with my wagon nearly spilling over with needed supplies. I remember how the children smiled. I remember how the mother wept. And I remember how the father stood, head bowed, unable to speak.

These impressions and many others forged within me a love for the poor, a love for my father who served as a shepherd to his flock, and a love for the faithful and generous members of the Church who sacrificed so much to help relieve the suffering of others.

Brothers and sisters, in a sense, you too can bring to a needy family a wagon brimming with hope. How? By paying a generous fast offering.

Parents, teach your children the joys of a proper fast. And how do you do that? The same as with any gospel principle—let them see you live it by your example. Then help them live the law of the fast themselves, little by little. They can fast and they can also pay a fast offering if they choose. As we teach our children to fast, it can give them the

power to resist temptations along their life's journey.

How much should we pay in fast offerings? My brothers and sisters, the measure of our offering to bless the poor is a measure of our gratitude to our Heavenly Father. Will we, who have been blessed so abundantly, turn our backs on those who need our help? Paying a generous fast offering is a measure of our willingness to consecrate ourselves to relieve the suffering of others.

Brother Marion G. Romney, who was the bishop of our ward when I was called on a mission and who later served as a member of the First Presidency of the Church, admonished: "Be liberal in your giving, that you yourselves may grow. Don't give just for the benefit of the poor, but give for your own welfare. Give enough so that you can give yourself into the kingdom of God through consecrating of your means and your time."¹²

The deacons in the Church have a sacred obligation to visit the home of every member to collect fast offerings for the poor. President Thomas S. Monson once related to me how he, as a young bishop, began to sense that the young deacons in his ward were complaining about having to get up so early to collect fast offerings. Instead of calling the young men to task, this wise bishop took them to Welfare Square in Salt Lake City.

There, the boys met a disabled woman operating the switchboard. They saw a blind man placing labels on cans, and an elderly brother stocking shelves. As a result of what they saw, President Monson said, a penetrating silence came over the boys as they witnessed the end result of their efforts to collect the sacred

funds that aided the needy and provided employment for those who otherwise would be idle.¹³

As members of the Church, we have a sacred responsibility to assist those in need and to help relieve their heavy burdens. Observance of the law of the fast can help all people of all nations. President Gordon B. Hinckley asked: "What would happen if the principles of fast day and the fast offering were observed throughout the world[?] The hungry would be fed, the naked clothed, the homeless sheltered. . . . A new measure of concern and unselfishness would grow in the hearts of people everywhere."¹⁴

Fasting in the proper spirit and in the Lord's way will energize us spiritually, strengthen our self-discipline, fill our homes with peace, lighten our hearts with joy, fortify us against temptation, prepare us for times of adversity, and open the windows of heaven.

Listen to the rich blessings prophesied for those who live the law of the fast: "Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. . . . The Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, . . . and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not."¹⁵

As we live the law of the fast, we not only draw nearer to God through prayer, but we feed the hungry and care for the poor. Each time we do so, we fulfill both of the great commandments upon which "hang all the law and the prophets."¹⁶

I know that Jesus the Christ lives. I know that President Gordon B. Hinckley is our prophet, seer, and revelator. And I bear solemn witness of this reality. I also bear witness that He who had compassion for the "least of these"¹⁷ looks with love and compassion upon those today who "succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees."¹⁸

I raise my voice in testimony and promise along with the great Apostles that have preceded us that those who live the law of the fast will surely discover the rich blessings that attend this holy principle. Of this I bear solemn witness in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.