

THE LAW OF THE FAST

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Robert L. Simpson was born on August 8, 1915, in Salt Lake City, Utah. He married Jelaire Chandler in the Mesa Arizona Temple on June 24, 1942. They had four children. Elder Simpson's first calling as a General Authority was as First Counselor to Presiding Bishop John H. Vandenberg on September 30, 1961. He later served as an Assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and as a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy. Elder Simpson died on April 15, 2003, in St. George, Utah, at the age of 87. The following article comes from a general conference address originally given in October 1967. Punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing have been standardized; subheads have been added.

By Elder Robert L. Simpson (1915–2003)

Of the Seventy

One of the most neglected and yet most needed laws for this troubled generation in a modern world of acceleration and distraction is the law of the fast. Fasting and praying have been referred to almost as a singular function from the earliest times. Adam's generation

fasted and prayed, as did Moses on Sinai ([see] Deuteronomy 9:9–11). . . .

. . . Following the Master's visit . . . to the Western Hemisphere, the people were told to continue in "fasting and prayer, and in meeting together oft both to pray and to hear the word of the Lord"

(4 Nephi 1:12). So complete and sincere were the people in obeying His commandments "that there was no contention among all the people, in all the land; but there were mighty miracles wrought among the disciples of Jesus" (4 Nephi 1:13). Wouldn't it be thrilling to enjoy such a condition today!

Prayer and Fasting Today

His law has been reconfirmed in our day, for through a modern prophet . . . , He said, "I give unto you a commandment that ye shall continue in prayer and fasting from this time forth" [D&C 88:76]. Then in the very next verse He mentions gospel teaching almost as a prime product of the prayer and fasting process. In the words of the Lord:

"And I give unto you a commandment that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom.

"Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand" (D&C 88:77–78).

No man or woman can hope to teach of things spiritual unless he is directed by that spirit, for "the Spirit shall be given unto

you by the prayer of faith; and if ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach.

“And all this ye shall observe to do as I have commanded concerning your teaching, until the fulness of my scriptures is given.

“And as ye shall lift up your voices by the Comforter, ye shall speak and prophesy as seemeth me good;

The sons of Mosiah “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.”

“For, behold, the Comforter knoweth all things, and beareth record of the Father and of the Son” (D&C 42:14–17).

A Promise for Every Teacher

Oh, that every teacher might catch the spirit of this promise and claim this offered partnership, available to all who are engaged in the teaching of truth.

There are no better examples

of teaching by the Spirit than the sons of Mosiah. The Book of Mormon tells us how they became “strong in the knowledge of the truth; for they were men of a sound understanding and they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God.

“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” (Alma 17:2–3).

Is there a priesthood or auxiliary leader any place in this Church who wouldn't give all to possess such power, such assurance? Remember this, above all else, that, according to Alma, they gave themselves to much fasting and prayer. You see, there are certain blessings that



can only be fulfilled as we conform to a particular law. The Lord made this very clear through the Prophet Joseph Smith when He declared, “For all who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world” (D&C 132:5).

Now, the Lord could not have stated the position more clearly, and, in my opinion, too many Latter-day Saint parents today are depriving themselves and their children of one of the sweetest spiritual experiences that the Father has made available to them.

The Monthly Fast Day

In addition to the occasional fasting experience for a special purpose, each member of the Church is expected to miss two [consecutive] meals on the fast and testimony Sunday. . . .

Competent medical authorities tell us that our bodies benefit by an occasional fasting period. That is blessing number one and perhaps the least important. Second, we contribute the money saved from missing the meals as a fast offering to the bishop for the poor and the needy. And third, we reap a particular spiritual

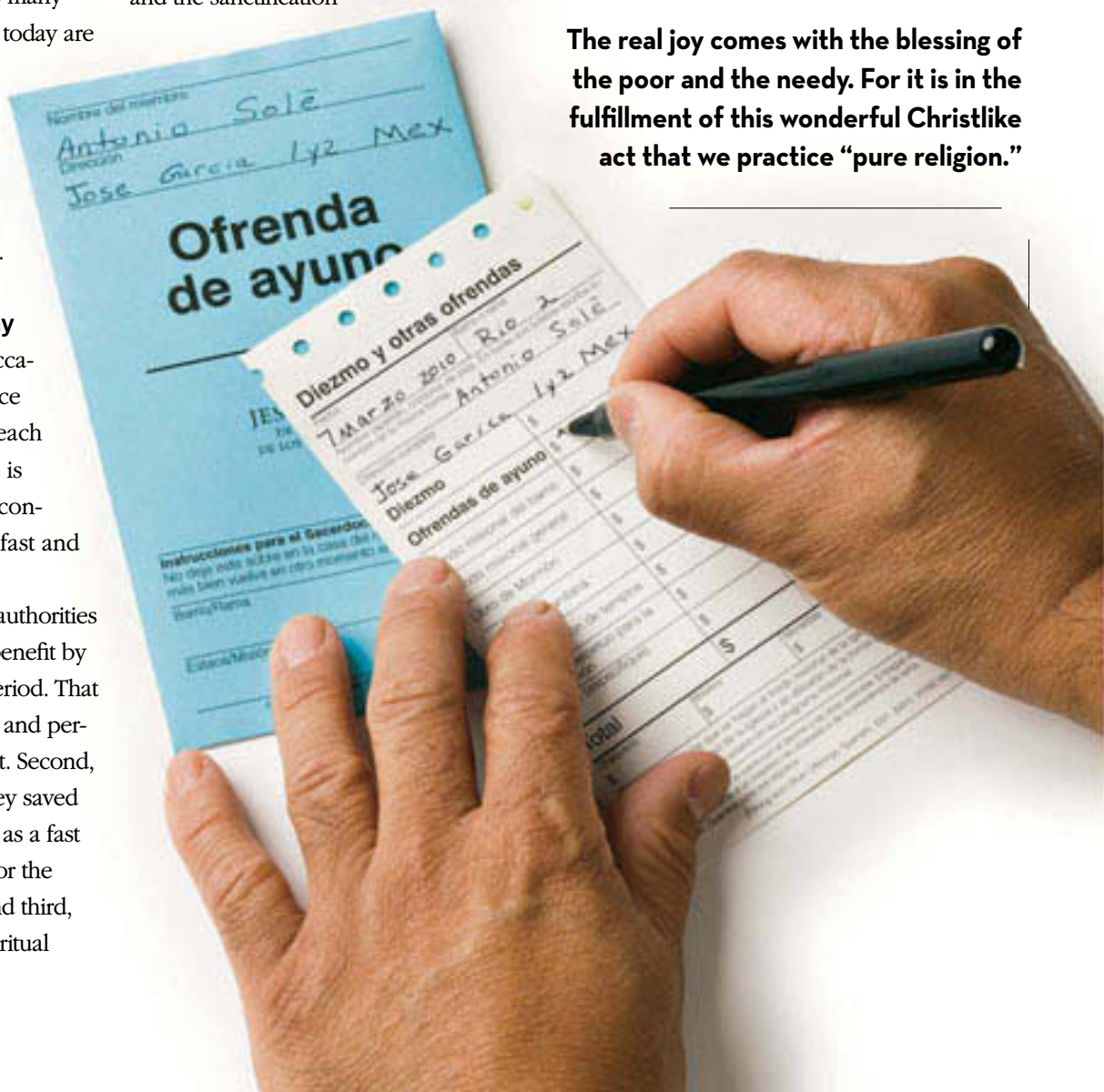
benefit that can come to us in no other way. It is a sanctification of the soul for us today just as it was for some choice people who lived 2,000 years ago. I quote briefly from the Book of Mormon: “Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer 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” (Helaman 3:35). Wouldn’t you like this to happen to you? It can, you know!

Did you notice it said that those who do this have their souls filled with “joy and consolation”? You see, the world in general thinks that fasting is a time for “sackcloth and ashes,” a time to carry a look of sorrow,



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as one to be pitied. On the contrary, the Lord admonishes:

“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

“But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

“That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly” (Matthew 6:16–18).

Blessings of Fasting

Now, we turn to the most important part of this great law. So far we have only discussed those areas that bless us. The real joy comes with the blessing of the poor and the needy. For it is in the fulfillment of this wonderful Christlike act that we practice “pure religion and undefiled” spoken of by James [see James 1:27]. Can you think of a better or more perfect Christian function than “pure religion and undefiled”? I can’t.

The Lord, speaking through Moses, observed:

“If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden

thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother:

“But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him” (Deuteronomy 15:7–8).

Then He goes on to promise him who gives: “The Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto” (Deuteronomy 15:10). He concludes: “Therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land” (Deuteronomy 15:11). . . .

A Perfecting Law

Yes, the law of the fast is a perfect law, and we cannot begin to approach perfection until we decide to make it a part of our lives. When you start and stop the fast is up to you, but wouldn’t it be nice to culminate it and be at your spiritual peak for the fast and testimony meeting?

How much you give the bishop as a donation is also up to you, but isn’t it thrilling to know that your accounting with the Lord has been paid willingly and with accuracy?

Satisfaction Comes with Obedience

. . . Have you ever noticed how satisfying it is way deep inside each time you are

obedient to Heavenly Father’s desires? There can be no equal to the peace of mind that always comes as the reward for obedience to truth.

The world needs self-discipline. You can find it in fasting and prayer. Our generation is sick for lack of self-control. Fasting and prayer help to instill this virtue.

The world’s future depends upon an urgent return to family unity. Fasting and prayer will help to guarantee it. Each person has greater need for divine guidance. There is no better way. We all have need to overcome the powers of the adversary. His influence is incompatible with fasting and prayer. . . .

. . . I join my testimony with Alma of old when he declared:

“Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety?

“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” (Alma 5:45–46). ■

