

Fasting Brings Us Closer to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ

Lesson
41

Purpose To help the children understand that fasting can bring them closer to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and that they can fast and pray for special blessings.

Preparation

1. Prayerfully study Mark 9:17–29 and Doctrine and Covenants 88:76.
2. It would be best to teach this lesson on a Sunday just before a fast Sunday.
3. If available in your area, prepare to show “The Law of the Fast” (4 minutes, 10 seconds) on *Family Home Evening Video Supplement* (53276).
4. Materials needed: prepare the following questions on strips of paper and place them in a container:
 - What does it mean to fast?
 - Who should fast?
 - When we fast and give our money to the bishop or branch president, what is the money called?
 - What does the bishop do with our fast offerings?
 - What are some reasons for fasting?
 - How does fasting help us?
 - When is fast Sunday?
 - What does fasting show Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ?
 - Would you be willing to fast if you or someone you love needed help?
5. Make the necessary preparations for any enrichment activities that you will be using.

**Suggested
Lesson
Development**

Invite a child to give the opening prayer.

Follow up with the children if you encouraged them to do something during the week.

Fasting Means Going without Food and Drink for a Righteous Purpose

Attention activity

Show the children “The Law of the Fast.”

Tell the following incident in your own words:

On one Sunday morning Phillip hurried into the kitchen where his mother was busy studying the scriptures.

“What’s for breakfast?” he asked. “I’m hungry.”

Phillip’s mother looked at him sadly and said, “Your father is not doing very well.”

Phillip’s father had been injured in an accident, and he lay sick in the hospital, unable to move.

“I thought he was getting better,” Phillip answered as his eyes filled with tears.

“Your father needs our faith and prayers today, Phillip,” his mother spoke softly. “We need to become close to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ now as we pray for your father to get well.”

“To do this,” Phillip’s mother continued, “we will not eat some of our meals today. We will go without food and drink. Would you be willing to do that for your father?”

“Yes, I would,” Phillip answered.

- What do we call going without food and drink for a righteous purpose? (Fasting.)

Explain that by fasting, we show Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ that we love them and trust them to help us and to answer our prayers.

Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ know it is hard for us to fast. They know that when we fast, our prayers are sincere and we really need their help.

Discussion

Explain that little children and people who are sick are not expected to fast. We begin to fast after we are baptized. Explain that because this is a requirement for those who are baptized, they should start to consider fasting about the time that they are old enough to be baptized.

Explain to the children that on at least one Sunday each month the members of the Church are asked to fast for two meals. During this time, we do not eat or drink. We call this special day each month fast Sunday.

Explain that our latter-day prophets have also asked us to give to those in need. They have asked us to give to the Church at least the amount of money that we save by not eating or drinking while we fast. The money that we give is called a fast offering, and it is used to help buy food and clothing for the poor and needy.

- What are fast offerings? (Money donated to the Church to help the poor.)
- What is this money used for? (To buy food, clothing, and other necessities for the poor and needy.)

Explain that we can fast and pray for help anytime, just as Phillip and his family did for Phillip’s father. We and those we love need Heavenly Father’s help all the time, but there are times when we have a particularly difficult problem to solve, or someone in our family is very ill. That is when we fast other than on fast Sunday.

Scripture story

Point out that Jesus Christ knew how helpful prayer and fasting can be. Tell the following story from Mark 9:17–29 in your own words. After you have finished telling the story, you might want the children to role-play it.

One day Jesus Christ and his disciples were together, and a large group of people had crowded around them. One man came through the crowd to Jesus. This man told Jesus the sad story of his son who had been very ill for many years. This man had asked Christ's disciples to bless the boy, but their blessings had not healed him. With tears in his eyes, the father asked Jesus to heal his son. He knew his son could be healed. Jesus blessed the sick boy, took him by the hand, and raised him to his feet. The boy was healed.

The disciples were amazed. After the man had taken his son away, the disciples asked Jesus why their blessing had not cured the boy. He answered that in order to heal this boy, they needed to do more than pray. They also needed to fast.

Tell the children that Heavenly Father always hears our prayers, but when we are willing to fast, we show Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ that we truly have faith in them.

Fasting Can Help Us Feel Closer to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ

Teacher
presentation

Point out that when we are willing to pray and fast, we show Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ that we love them and that we are trying to be close to them so that we can receive their help.

Stories and
discussion

To help the children realize how fasting and prayer can bring them closer to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, ask them to listen to the following stories.

Tell the following story in your own words:

It was spring and the farmers in the valley were worried. It had been a dry winter, and they needed rain so they could plant their crops.

The stake president decided to hold a special fast, and he asked each bishop to announce it to the members in his ward. He knew the people needed to draw closer to Heavenly Father and Jesus before they could receive the special help they needed. People from everywhere in the stake came to a meeting to join in praying and fasting. They prayed for rain or snow so they could plant their crops and they would grow. They waited and waited, but the moisture they needed did not come.

Months went by. The people continued to fast and pray. Finally, the stake president called another meeting. "Plant your crops," he told the people. "Heavenly Father has heard your prayers."

Even though the farmers had not seen any signs of rain, they did as they were directed. Within a few weeks, Heavenly Father's answer came. Day after day the rain fell, giving the crops the moisture they needed to grow. That year the farmers had one of the best crops they had ever seen. (See David Carl Danielson, "Rain in Due Season," *Ensign*, July 1978, pp. 68–69.)

- Why did the local Church leaders ask the people to fast and pray?
- How did fasting and prayer help them? (It brought them closer to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. They received the rain they needed for their crops to grow.)

Now tell the second story:

Rhonda, a young girl, was injured in an automobile accident. When her family heard the bad news, they rushed to her side at the hospital. She was in a coma, which means that she was unable to speak or move.

Day after day her family waited at the hospital, hoping and praying that she would be well again. But somehow, their prayers didn't seem to be enough. They wanted to feel closer to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, to show them their love and ask them to heal their daughter.

The family decided to fast and pray. All of their relatives, neighbors, and friends wanted to join them in the fast. The bishop announced the fast at church, and many in the ward fasted with them. They felt close to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ and knew that Heavenly Father would help them if it was best for Rhonda.

Later, while kneeling in prayer, Rhonda's parents had a feeling that their daughter would recover. As they entered her hospital room that morning, she looked up and spoke to them. Later she was able to sit up in bed and eat. Rhonda was going to recover. The bishop also told the family that because of that fast, the people of the ward had grown closer together and had shown more love for each other than ever before.

- What happened as a result of this special fast? (The girl was blessed and made well. The people in the ward grew closer and showed more love for each other.)

Remind the children that sometimes Heavenly Father has other plans for those who are sick or injured. When they do not get well following fasting and prayer, we need to accept Heavenly Father's will, knowing that his knowledge is much greater than our own.

Teacher testimony

Bear testimony of the importance of fasting by sharing an experience that would encourage the children to want to fast. This could be a personal experience or something that happened to someone you know. Explain that to fast and pray willingly is one of the most important ways to show Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ that we want to feel closer to them and receive their help.

Let the children tell of any experiences they know about fasting.

Summary

Discussion

Help the children review what they have learned about fasting and prayer. Have each child take a question from the container you have prepared and try to answer it.

- What does it mean to fast? (To go without food or drink for a righteous purpose.)
- Who should fast? (Everyone who can.)
- When we fast and give our money to the bishop or branch president, what is the money called? (Fast offerings.)
- What does the bishop do with our fast offerings? (He uses them to help the poor and needy.)
- What are some reasons for fasting? (To draw closer to Heavenly Father. To receive help from Heavenly Father. To help others. It is a commandment.)

- How does fasting help us? (It helps us feel closer to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.)
- When is fast Sunday? (It is usually the first Sunday of the month.)
- What does fasting show Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ? (That our prayers are sincere and that we have faith in them.)
- Would you be willing to fast if you or someone you love needed help?

Invite the children to talk to their parents about fasting and to decide when and how long they should fast.

Invite a child to give the closing prayer.

Enrichment Activities

Choose from the following activities those that will work best for your children. You can use them in the lesson itself or as a review or summary. For additional guidance, see “Class Time” in “Helps for the Teacher.”

1. For younger children, the following story and discussion might be useful:

JoAnn’s father had been on a long trip. When he returned, JoAnn was happy to see him. She gave him a big hug and kiss, and he handed her a small bag of special candy from the city where he had been.

JoAnn took the bag and ran into the backyard, where her little neighbor Danny was playing. Mother was tending Danny while his mother was sick.

“Look!” JoAnn shouted. “Look what my daddy brought me.”

Danny looked into the bag.

- What do you think JoAnn did next?

Do you think she said, “You can’t have any, “ or do you think she said, “I want you to have some”?”

How would Danny feel if she said, “You can’t have any”?” What would her daddy think if she said that? Would he be happy or sad?

If she said, “I want you to have some,” would Danny be happy? Would her father be happy? Would our Heavenly Father be happy? Would JoAnn be happy?

Well, JoAnn did say, “I want you to have some,” and everyone was happy.

On fast Sunday you can share just as JoAnn did. You can go without breakfast, and by not eating (mention the foods the children usually eat), you can save money for your parents. Then they can give this amount to the bishop, and he will give it to someone who is hungry.

- Will this make the people who need food happy?
- Will it make you happy?

2. Have the children draw a picture of someone they might want to fast for.