

OBJECTIVE

Each young man will realize that fasting, when properly understood and practiced, is a means of increasing spirituality and faith.

PREPARATION

1. Prayerfully study Esther 4:3; Isaiah 58:3–11; Joel 2:12; Matthew 4:1–4; 6:16–18; 9:14–15; Mosiah 27:22–24; Alma 5:44–46; 17:1–3; 34:28; 3 Nephi 27:1–3; and Doctrine and Covenants 59:13–14.
2. Materials needed:
 - a. Copies of the scriptures (each young man should bring his own).
 - b. Pencils for marking scriptures.
3. If it is available in your area, show “The Law of the Fast,” on *Family Home Evening Video Supplement* (53276).

SUGGESTED LESSON DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

Review

Review the following basic doctrines with the young men. If the young men in your class are familiar with this material, you might want to ask questions that will allow them to volunteer the information. You might also want to assign one or more young men in advance to prepare a short report explaining fasting to the rest of the quorum.

As members of the Church, we fast one day each month. This means that we abstain from food and drink for two meals. But fasting is more than just going without food and drink. When we fast, we should concentrate on spiritual things.

Fasting can help us develop great spiritual strength. It is one way to worship the Lord and to show our obedience and devotion. It is also a way to request special help, knowledge, or other blessings. Fasting should always be combined with prayer.

Scriptures and discussion

- What feelings or situations do you usually associate with fasting?

Ask the young men to watch for words that describe fasting as they read aloud Doctrine and Covenants 59:13–14, Esther 4:3, and Joel 2:12.

- Which words in these scriptures describe fasting or are associated with fasting? (*Joy, rejoicing, wailing, weeping, and mourning.*)

- Why do you think the scriptures relate fasting to both sadness and joy?

- What experiences have you had with fasting?

Explain that in this lesson you will discuss why we fast, what it means to fast properly, and the blessings that come from fasting. A proper fast can transform mourning into rejoicing.

Scriptures and discussion

Explain that in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught his disciples the proper way to fast. Have a young man read Matthew 6:16–18.

- According to this scripture, how should we act when we fast?

Explain that Jesus often fasted and prayed. Have a young man read Matthew 17:18–21.

- Why couldn't the disciples cast the evil spirit out of the child?

- Why do you think Jesus fasted and prayed so often?

Blessings Come from Fasting

Adviser presentation	Fasting can help us develop great spiritual strength. It is one way to worship the Lord, to show our obedience and devotion. It is also a way to request special help, knowledge, or other blessings. Fasting should always be combined with prayer.
Scripture and discussion	<p>Have a young man read 3 Nephi 27:1–3.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why were the disciples united in fasting and prayer?• How did the Lord respond to the prayers and fasting of his disciples? <p>Fasting and prayer are ways of hungering and thirsting after God, of drawing close to him and petitioning him for help. If we fast without prayer, the main result of our fasting will be physical hunger. If we fast with prayer, even physical hunger can remind us that we should spiritually hunger and thirst for God and his righteousness. Fasting helps us humble ourselves and draw closer to him.</p>
Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What things are appropriate to fast about?• What experiences have you had with fasting and prayer?• What present needs might you want to fast and pray about?
Scripture and discussion	<p>Explain that the scriptures give us many examples of people who received blessings through fasting and prayer.</p> <p>Have a young man read Mosiah 27:22–24. Ask a young man to recount the events that led to this situation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does this scripture teach you about seeking the help of the Lord? <p>Explain that although there are situations like this where people have fasted for longer periods of time, we should normally fast for only twenty-four hours.</p> <p>Have a young man read Alma 5:44–46. Explain that Alma the Younger is speaking approximately ten years after the miracle described in Mosiah 27.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How did Alma the Younger gain his testimony of the gospel? <p>Have a young man read Alma 17:1–3.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What blessings did the sons of Mosiah receive because of their prayers and fasting?• How did these blessings from fasting and prayer affect their missionary efforts?
Story	<p>Read or relate the following story told by Elder Matthew Cowley, which illustrates how proper fasting can help us receive the Spirit of the Lord:</p> <p>“We have a mutual friend down in Honolulu, . . . a man who is a young bishop down there, very wealthy, and yet a young man with a lot of humility. He was called one day from the Queen’s Hospital to come and bless a boy who had polio. A native sister had called him. He was her bishop, and she said, ‘Bishop, come up here, my boy is stricken with polio, and I want you to come up here and administer to him and bless him.’ All day she waited for him, and the bishop never showed up. All night he never showed up, the next morning he never showed up, but early in the afternoon here he came. She turned loose on him. She called him everything she could think of. ‘You, my bishop, I call you and tell you my boy is here stricken with polio. And you your own boss, you have your cars; you have a beautiful yacht; you have everything you want; and your time is your own; and you don’t show up. You just come now after a whole day.’ After she had finished and couldn’t think of anything more to call him, he smiled and said, ‘Well, after I hung up the receiver yesterday, I started to fast, and I’ve been fasting and praying for twenty-four hours. I’m ready now to bless your boy.’ At five o’clock that evening the boy was released from the hospital entirely cured of his polio” (<i>Matthew Cowley Speaks</i> [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1954], pp. 149–50).</p>
Testimony	Tell the young men about a time when you fasted and prayed and were blessed. Testify about the law of the fast.

Feasting on the Word of Christ

Adviser presentation	Explain that Alma 17:1–3 tells us that the sons of Mosiah received great spiritual blessings not only because they fasted and prayed, but also because they “searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God” (Alma 17:2). During a fast, we may feast on the word of God rather than on food and drink.
Scripture and discussion	<p>Have a young man read Matthew 4:1–4.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was the first way Satan tried to tempt the Savior? • What does this scripture say about our need for spiritual nourishment? <p>Explain that, like our bodies, our spirits need to be fed and nourished in order to grow and develop. Scripture study is a way to feed our spirits.</p>
Adviser presentation	<p>Explain that the Lord has repeatedly emphasized the need for spiritual nourishment. In his explanation of the oath and covenant of the priesthood, the Lord told priesthood bearers “to beware concerning yourselves, to give diligent heed to the words of eternal life. For you shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God” (D&C 84:43–44).</p> <p>Similarly, the prophet Nephi taught that we should be “feasting upon the word of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:20), and Moroni reported that members of the church of Christ in his day were “nourished by the good word of God” (Moroni 6:4). As we fast, we should seek nourishment for our souls through prayer and feasting on the word of Christ. Only these things can satisfy the soul that is hungering and thirsting after righteousness.</p>

Fast Offerings Sanctify Our Fasting and Prayer

Scripture and chalkboard discussion	<p>Explain that fasting allows us to care for those who are in need. The Lord has commanded us to give fast offerings to help the poor. Such offerings should be at least the equivalent of the cost of the two meals we skip while fasting.</p> <p>Have a young man read Alma 34:28.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does <i>vain</i> mean? (<i>Vain</i> means empty, meaningless, useless, and fruitless.) • What must we do so that our prayers are not in vain? <p>Have a young man read Isaiah 58:3–11.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why didn't the Lord accept the people's fasts? (See Isaiah 58:3–7.) • What does the Lord promise to those who fast properly and give a generous fast offering? (See Isaiah 58:8–11.) <p>As the young men respond, list the following phrases on the chalkboard:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Then shall thy light break forth as the morning” (verse 8). 2. “Thine health shall spring forth speedily” (verse 8). 3. “Thy righteousness shall go before thee” (verse 8). 4. “The glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward [rear guard]” (verse 8). 5. “Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer” (verse 9). 6. “The Lord shall guide thee continually” (verse 11). 7. “The Lord shall . . . satisfy thy soul in drought” (verse 11). 8. “Thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not” (verse 11). <p>In short, when we need him, the Lord will say, “Here I am” (Isaiah 58:9).</p>
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Conclusion

Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can fasting become a source of joy?
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Chalkboard
summary and
challenge

Help the young men conclude that although a fast may begin with feelings of mourning and yearning, it can end in joy and rejoicing. If we focus on the Lord when we fast, and seek his Spirit through prayer, scripture study, and offerings, he will bless us with his Spirit and comfort us.

As you discuss the following points, write them on the chalkboard, and challenge the young men to apply each principle as they fast:

1. Open the fast with prayer. We should begin a fast with prayer, telling Heavenly Father the purpose of our fast, asking him to consecrate the fast to the welfare of our souls, and pleading for his Spirit.
2. Abstain from food and drink for a twenty-four-hour period. We are counseled not to abstain from food and drink for longer periods of time. We should keep in mind the purpose of the fast and maintain a prayer in our hearts. We should constantly ask the question "Do I hunger and thirst to do the will of God as much as I hunger and thirst for food and drink?" When we are hungry or thirsty, we should feast upon the word of Christ and pray for his Spirit as nourishment.
3. Pay an appropriate fast offering to the Church. As a minimum, the offering should be the equivalent of the value of two meals. On two occasions, President Spencer W. Kimball invited us to pay more than the minimum if we are financially able to do so:
"Each member should contribute a generous fast offering for the care of the poor and the needy. This offering should at least be the value of the two meals not eaten while fasting" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1977, p. 126; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1977, p. 78).
"Sometimes we have been a bit penurious and figured that we had for breakfast one egg and that cost so many cents and then we give that to the Lord. I think that when we are affluent, as many of us are, that we ought to be very, very generous.
". . . I think we should be very generous and give, instead of the amount we saved by our two meals of fasting, perhaps much, much more—ten times more when we are in a position to do it" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1974, p. 184).
4. Close the fast with prayer. Just as we open the fast with prayer and continue it with a constant prayer in our hearts, we should close the fast with prayer, expressing gratitude for the law of the fast and other blessings.
5. Bear testimony. If occasion permits, we should bear our testimonies so that others may believe and rejoice. When we fast properly, we will receive a greater portion of the Lord's Spirit.