

## Fasting and Rejoicing

Recently I was talking with a friend and confided that I had never developed a testimony of fasting, it was just something I did. When I was a young child, it was just a terrible trial of hunger. As I moved into teenage years I would frequently pass out on fast Sunday's. On my mission I remember how hard it was to go without eating, especially in the heat and humidity. Sometime after Delkys and I got married I realized that I was getting migraine headaches every Monday after a fast Sunday. At that point I decided that it just wasn't worth it, and I stopped fasting for several years. However, during that same time Delkys was also unable to fast because of her health issues. As the children started to get older I realized that they were not seeing either of their parents fast, so I decided to start fasting again to be an example. And so I fasted, but it was always a monthly trial by hunger. I could go on and on, but I think you get the idea.

I have always thought about fasting in connection with the following two passages of scripture:

And on this day thou shalt do none other thing, only let thy food be prepared with singleness of heart that thy fasting may be perfect, or, in other words, that thy joy may be full. Verily, this is fasting and prayer, or in other words, rejoicing and prayer. (D&C 59:13,14)

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. (Alma 45:1)

It is obvious throughout the scriptures and any number of conference talks that my "fasting" was well out of step with the Lord's plan, and more accurately matched "starving." However, these two verses are even further away. Fasting is equated to rejoicing. How could that be? I prayed, I tried fasting with a purpose, but to no avail.

About three months ago another friend confided in me the sweetness he associated with fasting. I admitted I had no idea what he was talking about. He told me I needed to fast more to understand fasting. I nodded my head, but did nothing.

Fast Sunday was (I believe) the day after the most recent conversation I had. That fast was the torture to which I was accustomed. However, the thought was stuck in my mind that it was time that I resolved this situation. I concluded right then and there that the following Wednesday I would fast all day. This had the advantage that I would be at the temple as I came to the end of my fast.

This fast was unlike anything I had ever done in my life. In the first place, any time I felt hungry or uncomfortable I reminded myself that I was fasting because I had chosen to do so, not for any other reason. As the day went on and more and more thoughts came, I jotted the following in a little notebook I carry:

When I feel hunger pangs while fasting I am not feeling hungry, I am feeling the confirmation that I have chosen to fast.

When fasting and I see food I need to take responsibility for reminding myself that I don't really want to eat because I have chosen to fast. If I cannot do this then I am not fasting, I am starving.

I have somewhat humorously mused over the connection between "rejoicing" and "fasting" (as in D&C 59). I realize that I must approach fasting in a spirit of rejoicing or else it loses much of its significance.

Fasting at a very basic level is the closest I can come to the sacrifices of the Mosaic law.

The following Wednesday as I prepared to go to the temple again I decided I would fast again. The experience was very similar, except that the feelings of joy were stronger. I also prayed frequently asking the Lord that he would accept the offering of my fast. I have now determined that fasting brings so much joy into my life that I will fast every Wednesday.

Once each month we spend a Saturday in the temple working with the Spanish program. As I got up yesterday morning on the spur of the moment I decided that I would fast yet again. The feelings of joy were all-encompassing.

I am so grateful to my Heavenly Father for teaching me these things. It is a blessing that I have vaguely hoped for much of my life, but

never really believed that I would achieve. The change has been sudden and complete. Fasting is now significantly different from starving, and I hope to be able to maintain that difference in my life. Heavenly Father is so anxious to bless us if we will but leave open the avenue for him to do so. I love the Lord, I love life, and I am excited for the future.