

- both the "gifts" (Rom 12; 1 Cor 12) and the "fruits" (Gal 5:22-23) of God's Holy Spirit—for ourselves and for the Church.
- e. **Praise and Thanksgiving:** We should regularly give thanks to God for His many blessings, His protection, His truth (1 Thes 5:18). We should thank Him for His creation, for His mercy, for His plan that includes us. We need to remember that all that we have, every good and perfect gift, IS from Him (James 1:16-17). And we should regularly thank the great giver, *our* Father in Heaven, for all of this.
  - f. **God's Intervention:** We should ask, seek, and knock at God's doorstep (Matt 7:7-12). He knows our needs before we ask, but He wants us to ask Him nonetheless. He wants us to claim His promises, and they include the promise to heal (James 5:13-16) and to make a way of escape out of our trials (1 Cor 10:13). Ultimately, though, even with our requests, we must be willing to yield to God's will, as King David did after the death of his son (2 Sam 12:20-23).
  - g. **God's Protection:** We live in a world ruled by Satan the Devil. He is constantly trying to devour us spiritually (1 Peter 5:8). We need to be vigilant in praying for not only God's physical protection, but also His *spiritual protection* from deception (Matt 6:13). These prayers can certainly be aimed at our personal lives, but should also focus on our brethren both locally and around the world.
  - h. **God's Soon-Coming Kingdom:** We are commanded to pray for God's soon-coming kingdom (Matt 6:10) and we are to want that kingdom more than anything else, save God's righteousness (Matt 6:33). We should regularly take time to pray fervently for the return of Christ to this earth, to establish His everlasting kingdom of true peace and prosperity for all. To pray this way, we must truly *want* this kingdom. If we do not, we can ask God to help us want it above all things. Along these lines, we develop a strong relationship with God, through regular prayer, so that we will be counted worthy to escape the Great Tribulation (Luke 21:36) and so that we can be counted worthy to stand before Christ.

### III. Fasting (Handout 2)

**Group Question:** Why should we fast? What are the spiritual benefits of fasting?

#### A. Why We Fast

Will merely going without food for a day result in an effective fasting experience? Why do you fast? Do you fast in order to reach a certain number of fasting experiences each year? Do you fast aside from Atonement and perhaps one additional Church-wide fast each year? What do you plan to gain or learn from your fasts? Do you plan for your fasts?

As most of us know, fasting is a spiritual tool given to us by the Almighty God. He gave us this tool, not as an instrument to be placed in a storage closet, but as an instrument *to be used regularly*. Becoming more like Christ cannot occur unless all of our spiritual tools are regularly used, and that includes fasting.

We live in a world ruled by Satan the Devil. He is constantly pulling at us and trying to get us to fail. In his twisted wisdom, Satan attempts to activate our remaining human nature and use it against us, prodding us to spiritually surrender to him. The Apostle Paul highlighted the ongoing struggle within his own heart and mind (Rom 7:13-25; 8:1-10)—pointing to the struggle between his converted mind and his remaining carnality.

Fasting is a tool of humility given to us by God, to assist in displacing our remaining vanity and "self." If used properly and regularly, fasting can help bury that carnal "old man" or "old woman" who was not completely buried at baptism. Fasting is designed to help us put down "self" and allow Christ to more fully and completely live His life in us.

Fasting helps us remain and become more humble so that God can more effectively use us. Without regular fasting, we will not be in a proper state of mind for God to use us. We see an example of this when God could not use the disciples to cast out demons, because they had not been fasting and praying effectively (Matt 17:21).