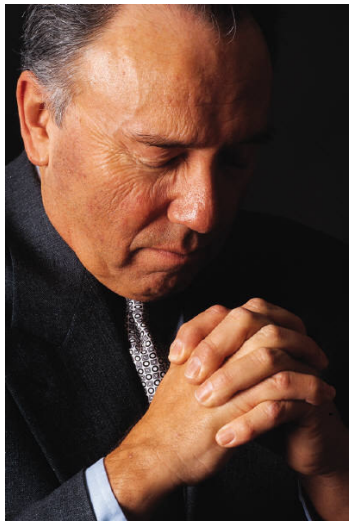
"When all is said and done may we have the testimony of Daniel, "So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting..."

Daniel 9:3

Florida Baptist Convention
A Cooperative Program Ministry
Prayer and Spiritual Awakening
Rick Shepherd, Director
1230 Hendricks Avenue
Jacksonville, FL 32207
800-226-8584 x3098

FLORIDA BAPTIST CONVENTION
PRAYER & SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Rick Shepherd, Director



Seeking God

- A Spiritual Check-Up
- How to Deal with Sin
- Guidelines for Prayer and Fasting

What Are You Seeking?

Be honest. What are you really seeking in life? What does your daily schedule reveal? Many are seeking satisfaction and significance, striving with all their might for just a few crumbs from the world's table to feed their starving egos or seeking a sip from the world's cup to quench their thirsty souls. God knows what we need. If one seeks Him, He promises to truly satisfy. Those rightly related to Jesus find their true significance in knowing and walking with Him—being His child, loving and obeying Him, serving as His servant, walking with and following Jesus as Lord and Savior. That is what we were made for. Jesus offered a walk with Himself in this summary statement, *"If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me"* (Luke 9:23). Note that this is not a call to downgrade oneself but simply to say "no" to self by saying "yes" to Jesus, to His will and His way. We are meant to die to "self" and live to Jesus.

Jesus continued, *"For whoever wishes to save his soul-life shall lose it, but whoever loses his soul-life for My sake, he is the one who will save it"* (Luke 9:24). A person can seek to grasp and gain all the world can offer—fame, riches, "significance"—but end up empty, in the end a loser. Jesus stated it this way, *"For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?"* (9:25) Think about it—if one gains the whole world—that means ALL of it—he or she is still in the losing column.

When Jesus talked about the matter of saving one's life or losing it for His sake, He was not just talking about eternal life in heaven, something to experience when life on earth is over. He was talking about one's "soul-life" now as well. He targeted the drive to thrive that so many seek—the seeking for success, satisfaction, and significance that pushes and drives and motivates millions. The problem is that when a person seeks only for himself and fails to follow Jesus, he or she never gets there. Trying to find true significance or satisfaction the "self" way is always just out of reach; it's tomorrow's goal, tomorrow's prize, and tomorrow never comes.

Notes

"Oh give thanks to the LORD,
call upon His name;
Make known His deeds
among the peoples.
Sing to Him, sing praises to Him;
Speak of all His wonders.
Glory in His holy name;
Let the heart of those
who seek the LORD
be glad.
Seek the LORD and His strength;
Seek His face continually.
Remember His wonderful deeds
which He has done,
His marvels and
the judgments from His mouth."

1 Chronicles 16:8-12

What is the answer? Seek the Lord. Seek His Kingdom. Die to self and self-centered, self-initiated agendas. Invest in eternity—in your own walk with God and in bringing others into a saving relationship and a worshiping walk with Jesus Christ. How? Start by simply setting aside time to pray and read His Word. Pray through the ***"Spiritual Check-Up"*** and allow the Lord to speak to you. Read through **"How to Deal with Sin"** and apply those truths to your life. Obey what the Lord says to you. You may need to go through **"Making It Right"** to clear up some things in your life. You may also want to spend some time in prayer with fasting. Look at the **"Guidelines for Prayer and Fasting"** and follow the leadership of the Lord. Sometimes we have trouble hearing from God. It may help you to read and pray through **"Overcoming Static."** Whatever the case, as you seek the Lord, He will respond. Trust Him. Call on Him. He will answer. Then, begin following Him in reaching out to others, praying for others, telling them of life in Jesus, and walking together in the journey of following Him. Real life is found only in Jesus, in knowing and following Him—real life ***Now*** and real life ***Forever***.

"Seek the LORD and His strength,
Seek His face continually."

I Chronicles 16:11

©2004—Richard L. Shepherd. Some of the material in ***Seeking God in Prayer*** is adapted from ***Following God: Life Principles for Praying God's Way*** (©2003 Richard L. Shepherd), AMG Publishers. Used by permission.

A Spiritual Check-Up √

- Are you walking in the fear of the Lord? Do you fear the opinions of men or seek the favor of men more than the opinion and favor of God?
- Are you walking in humility toward the Lord? Do you value the Lord and your relationship with Him more than anything else? Do you spend time with Him in His Word and in prayer on a daily basis?
- Do you honor Him as your Lord, as your God?
- Do you surrender and submit yourself daily to Him?
- Are you withholding anything from the Lord? Is there any area of your life or anything in your life that you have reserved for yourself and are not allowing the Lord to have His way in that area?
- Are you obeying the Lord promptly?
- Are you obeying the Lord fully?
- Are you grateful? Do you give thanks to Him in everything?
- Is there any sin against Him that you have failed to confess and make right?
- Is there an offense against someone that you have not made right?
- Is there some restitution you need to make, but you have not done so?
- Are you walking yielded to the fullness and control of the Holy Spirit?
- Are you spending time in the Word of God?
- Do your opinions, thoughts and words agree with the Word of God?

"Can you hear Me now?" — God

What to do?

You have got to remove the barrier or adjust yourself so that the barrier is out of the way...so that the problem is cleared up. In other words you must determine a different course. In Isaiah 59:1-2 Isaiah describes the barrier between Israel and the Lord. They were trying to "get through" but the Lord was not listening because of the condition of their hearts and lives. Their sin blocked the way. They were not listening to Him nor obeying Him. As a result their sin also blocked any effective praying or true fellowship with the Lord. In that chapter, the answer comes in God's provision of a Savior and that is our provision as well. If there is a barrier, determine a different course and that will always mean coming to the Savior, dealing with sin His way, and then walking in the right direction with Him.

The Lord longs for us to walk with Him

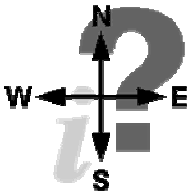
He desires an open, transparent, loving fellowship and wants us to work with Him in a harmonious, cooperating, yoked partnership (Matthew 11:28-30). He is the Owner and Managing Partner. We are the Cooperating "Yes, Lord" partner. And in that close "yoke" relationship we find that He continually works with us in a day to day lifestyle of 1) changing direction, 2) drawing near, and 3) clearing out dead space. It is all part of our moment by moment surrender and His moment by moment overcoming of us...and that is the way to learn to overcome static.

God desires an open, transparent, loving fellowship and wants us to work with Him in a harmonious, cooperating, yoked partnership.

How do we overcome the static?

It is simple

Just like in trying to pick up a clear radio signal, we have to tune our receivers to pick up the signal. How? There are basically 3 things that cause the static to over-power a clear signal…



- Direction
- Distance
- Dead space

Change Direction

We have to continually line up our hearts and minds with His. That begins by redirecting our hearts and minds to line up with His heart and mind. That happens in His Word. Reading, reading, reading. Thinking, thinking, thinking. Meditating, meditating, meditating. Listening to Him for insight and obeying when He speaks. As we do this we begin to sensitize our spiritual ears. We fine tune our hearts.

If the problem is Distance, we need to turn around and DRAW NEAR to Him. Again, time in the Word is one of the best ways to draw near. Set aside time in an undistracted place and draw near in prayer and the Word (James 4:1-10).

The problem may be Dead Space…a place where something significant is coming between you and the signal. If you are on the highway it may be a hill or mountain or a tunnel or some other signal interfering with the signal you are trying to listen to. Whatever it is, it places you in a dead space and the static is overpowering.

- Is there any command or Scripture that you are knowingly disobeying?
- Do you pray in line with the Word of God? Do you pray God's Word?
- Are you consistent in your witness at home? Does your family see you living a life that says Jesus is your Lord and Savior? Do your words reflect that you know Jesus?
- Do your neighbors know that you are a Christian? Are you a witness to them?
- Are you willing to be a witness in your community? Are you willing to be a witness beyond your community? On a vacation? On a business trip? With relatives or friends?
- Are you involved in a ministry at your local church? Are you using the spiritual gifts God has given you? Are you praying consistently to minister in the power and control of the Holy Spirit?
- Are you doing all God wants you to do in the mission He has for you? Are you willing to go wherever He wants you to go in the mission He has for you? Are you willing to give your time, your money, and your energies to the mission God is accomplishing throughout the world? Are you praying for that mission and your part in that mission?
- Are you being a faithful steward over what God has given you? Financially do you provide for the needs of your family? The needs of the church? Physically, do you watch your health? Your eating? Materially, do you take care of your house, car, material possessions? Are you and your possessions available to the Lord for His use whenever, wherever, however?
- Are you taking up your cross daily, dying to self?
- Are you submitting to God and resisting the devil in temptation?
- Are you dying to the world and counting the world as dead to you?

HOW TO DEAL WITH SIN

Dealing with Your Personal Sin

God is Faithful to Convict. As you read the Word of God, study with a small group or listen to a message being preached or taught, God will often convict of some sin. He wants us to come to Him, agree with Him about the sin, agree to turn from the sin, agree to turn to what is right in that particular area or in that relationship and by faith receive His forgiveness and cleansing for that sin.

Ask God. If you think there is a fellowship break between you and the Lord, go to Him in prayer asking Him to show you what is displeasing to Him. Ask Him to reveal anywhere you have stepped over the line of His Word, anywhere you have grieved or quenched His Spirit. He promises to show us where there is sin (John 16:8-11)

"Broken Fellowship"

Go to Him in prayer asking Him to show you what is displeasing to Him.

Watch Out for False Guilt and Lies. The enemy, the evil one is also called the adversary—he is against God, against God's people and against God's purposes. He is also the accuser accusing God and accusing "the brethren," all believers (Revelation 12:10). He is the father of lies and spreads untruth anywhere he can—lies about God, about God's Word, about God's people, about anything to create division, discord and distrust. When it comes to the lives of individual believers, he shoots "thought darts" to accuse—either of sin we have committed or even of sin which we have faced in temptation but have not committed, anything to confuse, frustrate, condemn and make us feel guilty. Remember this—to be tempted is not a sin, to have tempting thought is not sin. It is not a sin until we act on that temptation, making a choice to sin. When we do we need to confess it and get it right.

Overcoming "Static"

Do what? What does that mean?

It means that on planet earth we experience different kinds of "static" - sometimes it is "static-cling", other times it is "static" from people, and then there is radio "static" and cell-phone "static." The kind of "static" that I am referring to is the "static" we face in our walk with God, especially in our communication with Him whether in a specific prayer time or in the hour by hour daily walk of "praying without ceasing" the listening, talking, seeking to be sensitive to His Spirit as we go about our daily routines at work, at home, in the car, shopping, wherever.

What does this "static" look like or sound like?

You have probably experienced it but may not have realized it. Here is one example. When we come to pray, many times we rush in and start talking and listing requests and then our mind wanders a little, then back to talking and listing requests and then we have gotta go. In that time, the Lord has been trying to get through and we have either been too busy listing requests or we have become accustomed to "static" in our hearts. It goes something like this...Lord, I come before You and life up this request and...(we keep on talking)...The Lord is speaking and trying to guide us in that request or to tell us "no" or "not yet" or "not best for you" or He wants to give us better insight into our request...something like...You don't need that" or "I have something better. Wait on Me. I love you". But what we hear (or don't hear) is..."*Ykhkhkhkhkhkhkhkhk* (sound of static) need that *khkhkhkhkhk* have *khkhkhkhkhkhk*. We miss what He's trying to say to us.

Wait on me...I have something better...I love you,

God

The Final Question

How is a fast to be done?

First of all, the heart attitude and motive must be right. Fasting is directed to the Lord, not to the people (Matthew 6:16-18).

Secondly, let the Lord lead you as to the timing and length of a fast. Remember, it is the heart attitude. We can't go on a "holy hunger strike" and expect the Lord to "give in" to our desires.

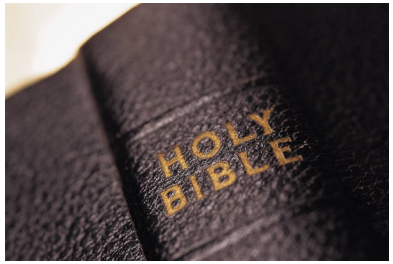
Thirdly, there are some Practical Guidelines:

- Keep your focus on the Lord trusting Him in the situation and need.
- Stay in the attitude of prayer throughout the day. Set aside segments of time for specific prayer. Pray often.
- Read Scripture much during your time of prayer and fasting. Praying is as much listening as talking. Record any insights you gain. You may want to write down some of your specific requests in a Journal or notebook.
- Concerning meals missed, skipping one, two or three consecutive meals is a normal fast. Some may choose one, two or three days. Others may fast several days. Drink plenty of juices and/or water as you fast. For those who go on an extended fast, it would be helpful to read one of the books that gives information and guidelines on an extended fast.
- For those on medication or who have been ill, be cautious and get an OK from your doctor.
- Some are not able to fast because of a physical condition. They must have regular meals. The Lord may lead you to "fast" from certain foods. Remember, the important thing is the heart attitude not the calorie count.
- Sometimes, there may be a little dizziness, headache or nausea from not eating. Do not be alarmed. Remember to drink extra liquids.
- At the end of your fast, it is helpful to eat fruit or soup. Don't eat a big meal. Your eyes may be bigger than your stomach so watch out for gluttony (the fruit of the Spirit is self-control—Galatians 5:22-23)

The Spirit is Specific. When the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, He is specific so we can confess specifically, "Lord, here is what I did, when I did it. I was wrong. I turn from it. I want to do the right thing. Thank You for forgiving me." Satan is often general, condemning and confusing— "you are bad, weak, foolish…etc."

God Does Not Remember Sins so as to Use Them Against Us. The Holy Spirit does not bring up old sins. Those are removed, forgiven and forgotten. Satan uses instant replay to remind us, hassle us, depress us, defeat us. He nags at us — "Remember how many times you have done that. You will never change. You cannot do anything right. Remember." God has not called us to remember our sins. Instead of remembering old sins, simply remember the promises of the Word of God and hold to them (Hebrews 10:17-18).

Receive Forgiveness by Faith not by Feeling. Trust the Word of God to be true, as true as the God of the Word. Deal with bedrock facts, not shifting-sands feelings. Jesus died to forgive, not condemn. First John 1:7-9 points to the work of Christ through His blood. He is always faithful to forgive.



Trust the Word of God to be true, as true as the God of the Word.

Dealing with Your Personal Sin Against Others

Something Against You. If someone has something against you, you need to go to that person (or persons) - face to face, if possible, or by phone call if not face to face (Matthew 5:23-23). If you cannot reach the person either way, seek the next best way, the fastest way possible. Ephesians 4:26 says, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger." In other words, deal with any sin, especially anger, on the day you face it. It is like household garbage; the longer you wait to get rid of it, the worse it stinks. What if he or she does not receive you or your attempt to get things right or does not forgive you? You are responsible for you. Let God deal with that person.

The Circle of Confession is as big as the circle of offense. If your sin is against God, confess it to Him. If you have sinned against an individual, go to that individual, confess and make it right. If you have sinned against a group, make it right with the group.

Restitution. If there is need for restitution—financial, material, property lost or stolen, whatever—make it right as much as is possible. The burden may seem heavy now, but making it right makes the burden on your heart turn into wings for your soul.

The Practice of Fasting

There are several kinds of "fasts" that we can practice. Many times the intensity of the need will determine this. Let's answer some basic questions about the practice of fasting.

What kind of fast? There is 1) a limited fast—a person limits their diet for a time as a part of seeking to do the will of God. This is found in Daniel 1:8-13 where Daniel and his three friends asked for a limited diet in order to follow God's Law and God's Will.

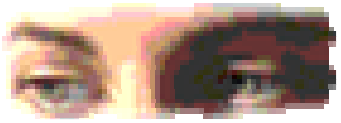
There is 2) a standard fast—a person eats no food but does drink liquids. This is the most common fast in the Scriptures.

There is 3) an absolute fast— a person does not eat or drink for a period of time. Esther called for a three-day fast of this kind. A person normally cannot go without liquids for more than 3 days. Moses experienced two supernatural fasts of 40 days each in which he neither ate nor drank anything in the presence of the Lord on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:1-2, 27-28; Deuteronomy 9:9-29; 10:1-5, note verses 9:9 and 9:18).

Who should fast? A fast can be by one person—a personal fast. It can be a partner fast in which two or more enter in. This would be true of a husband and wife, a small group such as a class or leadership team (Acts 13:1-3), or a congregation coming together in a heart to heart seeking of the Lord (Ezra8:21-23). There are also community fasts (city, tribe or nation) in which all are called to fast as in Jonah 3 or 2 Chronicles 20:3.

When should a person or group fast? The scriptures command one regular fast for those in the Old Covenant. In Leviticus 16:29-31, the nation of Israel is told to humble their souls (implying fasting) on the Day of Atonement. There are no regular fast days commanded in the New Testament. Any *regular* fast day found there is the product of man-made regulations and is usually marked by a generous helping of man-centered pride (Luke 18:12; Colossian 2:16-23). All other fasts are occasional fasts according to the need of the moment.

A Humble Admission of Need



In the New Testament we find examples of those who sought the Lord with a whole heart at a time of great need or as an expression of humble dependence on the Lord to guide or provide in some way. In Matthew 4:2, Jesus revealed His dependence on His father during the wilderness temptations. The 40 days of prayer and fasting were a time of intense focus on the Father and submission to all of His Will and His Word. When Jesus taught on fasting, He clearly showed that it was a matter of a heart to heart focus on the Father, a submission to His will, and trusting in His supply for the need (Matthew 6:16-18).

In Luke 2:37 Anna's life of "fasting and prayers" reveals a lifetime of focused service and dependence on the Lord. In Acts 13:1-3 and 14:23, we see clear evidence of a step-by-step dependence on the Lord in the early church. Whether determining the Lord's will in the direction of ministry or in appointing the right leadership, they sought the Lord wholeheartedly in prayer and fasting.

3)
A third summary reason for fasting practiced by some can be stated as A HAUGHTY ATTEMPT TO GET ONE'S OWN WAY. Isaiah 58:1-4 is one of the clearest rebukes to a proud heart full of selfish motives. That kind of fasting was of no benefit. In Zechariah 7:5 we find a people who have performed a regular fast but for selfish reasons and with no sensitivity to the Lord and His ways (see 7:1-12). In Luke 18:12 a ritualistic Pharisee found no response from God. God was not impressed with his self righteous fasting.

God looks at the heart not the outer man. He is concerned that we are walking humbly before Him with a desire only to do His will. He delights in us seeking Him with a whole heart and sometimes a whole heart means a time of fasting. That brings us to The Practice of Fasting. How do we go about a time of prayer and fasting? What are the procedures?

Dealing with Others Who Have Sinned Against You

When Someone Sins Against You, first have a forgiving, kind attitude toward that one, "forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." (Ephesians 4:32). What if he or she does not ask for forgiveness? You are responsible for you. Obey God. Show love. Let God deal with that person.

- To Get things right, you have **One of Two Choices. 1) Forget it** and do not mention it. The person may be unaware he has offended you in some way. "Love covers a multitude of sins." (1 Peter 4:8) **2) Go to** him and point out the offense in order to restore the relationship (not in order to make the person feel bad or guilty). God's goal is oneness with Him and with one another—walk in harmony, peace and real love toward one another (1 Peter 3:8-18) "As much as depends on you, live peaceable with all men." (Romans 12:18 NKJV).

You are responsible for you.
Obey God. Show love.

"Forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."
Ephesians 4:32

Making It Right...

It is important to make sure we are clear with the Lord. At times we need to spend extra time with the Lord in prayer, asking Him to show us any unconfessed sin or any offenses against others that we have failed to clear up. It sometimes helps to write down what we have done and then acknowledge God's forgiveness and cleansing. In the space below or on a separate sheet of paper confess and write down anything the Holy Spirit brings to mind-any unconfessed sin or offense undealt with. Agree with God that it is sin, that you have turned from it, and that you are walking in what He says is right. Where there is an offense, go to him or her person and make it right. If you cannot see him or her face to face, call them. If you cannot call, then email or write them and ask their forgiveness. GO back over the list, claiming and thanking the Lord for the forgiveness and cleansing provided through His blood (Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 1:7-9). Then, throw the list away and rejoice in the grace brought by Jesus Christ.

Guidelines for Prayer and Fasting

The Purpose of Fasting

Why Fast? The Scriptures clearly reveal the purpose of fasting through several examples in the life of the nation Israel and in the life of Jesus and the early church. In a survey of the Scriptures, there are at least three summary reasons given for fasting.

1)

The first is A HUMBLE ADMISSION OF NEED. The need may be forgiveness of sin, comfort over some grief or sorrow, concern over the situation of an individual, a city, or a nation, or the need for guidance and direction from the Lord. For example, when Nehemiah heard about the condition of Jerusalem he immediately began to mourn and seek the Lord in fasting and prayer (Nehemiah 1:4-11). He readily admitted the need of the people of God. In Daniel 9:3 Daniel writes, "I gave my attention to the Lord God..." Literally the verse says, "I set my face..." It is a picture of focused concentration on the Lord, ready to admit the needs of the moment. (For other examples, see I Samuel 7:6; 31:13; I Kings 21:27-29; Nehemiah 9:1; Esther 4:1-3; Isaiah 58:5-6; Psalms 35:13; 69:10; 109:24).

2)

The second summary reason is A HUMBLE REQUEST FOR HELP. This is closely linked to the first reason. Before we will ask for help we have to admit we have a need—a need we know we cannot meet. God alone can give the needed help. This can include seeking the Lord's guidance for a decision (Judges 20:26), for healing (2 Samuel 12:16-23) or for safety and protection (Ezra 8:21-23). Esther 4:16 records Esther's plea for the people to "fast for me" for three days concerning the deliverance of the Jewish people. In Jonah 3:3-10, the entire city of Nineveh entered into a fast to repent of their wickedness and seek deliverance from certain judgment. An example of a plea for national deliverance is found in 2 Chronicles 20:3-4. Other examples of asking for a need are found in Daniel 9:3; Isaiah 58:7-12; and Jeremiah 36:1-9.