Tallowood Fasting Together

"And when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."
Jesus, see Matthew 6:16-18

"Some have exalted religious fasting beyond all Scripture and reason;
and others have utterly disregarded it." John Wesley

Throughout the Bible fasting refers to abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. While fasting is not an exclusively Christian practice (most major world religions practice some sort of fasting), there are significant examples of fasting through out the Bible: Moses, David, Elijah, Esther, Daniel… Anna and Paul. Jesus fasted. In His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, He assumed that we would fast (in the same manner as we pray and give). While He didn't command fasting, Jesus gave guidance as to how we are to fast: not for show, but as unto the Father (Matt. 6:16-18).

Fasting, like other spiritual disciplines, opens a space God can fill, move, and work. *"A fast is the self-denial of normal necessities in order to intentionally attend to God in prayer. Bringing attachments and cravings to the surface opens a place for prayer. This physical awareness of emptiness is the reminder to turn to Jesus who alone can satisfy."* (*Handbook of Spiritual Disciplines*, p. 245.) While fasting is not a necessity, it is an opportunity to make room for God in a special way. It is best done out of loving obedience and with a desire to be filled with God.

Though a fast is often from food, it can also include laying aside something that is normally need-meeting in order to focus intentionally on time with God. In fact, <u>there are those who have physical situations who would be wise not to fast from food</u>. Other fasts could be from media (phone, TV, computers) or other habits or comforts in order to give God our undivided attention for a season.

Some practical considerations as we fast together (particularly related to fasting from food):

- Consider fasting after an early supper one day, through breakfast and lunch the next day, and breaking the fast with supper on the second day. Your fast may last 24 hours, yet will only involve fasting for two meals.
- Do not eat a huge "last" meal before beginning your fast. Eat as you normally would.
- Drink plenty of water during the entirety of the fast!
- Use (what would have been) your meal times for prayer.
- Break your fast with a normal meal as well. No need to make up for missed meals.

<u>Suggested morning prayers</u>: Focus on the Psalms as you spend time with God. You may want to select a couple of the following. It is okay to linger over even one Psalm. Enjoy the time.
Psalms 15, 16, 19, 27, 31, 34, 37, 40, 42/43, 46, 57, 63, 86, 91, 103, 107, 116, 130, 138, 143, 145
Ask to hear what God says to you and to our church as we pay attention to Him and spend time with Him.

Suggested options from which to select for noon reading and praying:
Continue reading, praying, and meditating on Psalms.
Read about Israel's fast in 2 Chronicles 20.
Read Isaiah 58, where the Lord describes the type of fast that He has chosen for His people.
Read the book of Esther; consider the role of fasting in God's movement on behalf of His people.
Read of Jesus' wilderness fast in Matthew 4, Mark 1, and Luke 4. Reading entire chapters will help us see the fast in the context of the Father's work in and through Jesus.
Read Acts 1 and 2, the birth of the Church.
What is God saying or showing to you? How will you act on or speak of or pray about this?

Breaking your fast:
End your fast with a normal meal. No need to make up for missed meals. If you are able, share this meal with another person. As you thank God for the food set before you, thank him also for the season of your fast.
If your fast begins on Tuesday evening, consider joining us for the Midweek Prayer Service, 6pm Wednesday, to worship and pray together! You may choose to break your fast following the service.

Processing your experience of fasting:

1. "Fasting reminds us that we are sustained 'by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God' (Matt. 4:4). Food does not sustain us; God sustains us." (*Celebration of Discipline*, p. 55.)
   How did fasting impact your Bible reading?

2. "More than any other Discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us." (*Celebration of Discipline*, p. 55.) How do we cover up or escape from deeper needs in our lives with food and other good things?

3. When has God used the practice of self-denial in your life to bring about something good? How does fasting address the issue of entitlement in our lives?

4. Whatever is begun in your soul during a fast will take time to become apparent. Do not be disappointed if it seems like "nothing special happened." God is at work even in silence and hiddenness: those are ideal conditions for seeds to begin to grow. Pray that God will bring fruit from your fast—in His time.

Thank you for fasting and for seeking the Lord together.
"Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.'"
Isaiah 58:9a

For further reading:
7 Basic Steps to Successful Fasting and Prayer, Bill Bright
"Fasting" in *Handbook of Spiritual Disciplines*, Adele Ahlberg Calhoun
"The Discipline of Fasting" in *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard J. Foster
A Hunger for God, John Piper
God's Chosen Fast: A Spiritual and Practical Guide to Fasting, Arthur Wallis