

# FROM THE PASTOR'S PEN



October 2009



## MOVING AND SEARCHING

Leslie, the boys and I have recently sold our house in Escalon, which we have been trying to sell for some time now. Simply put, the private lender that participated in the mortgage when I arrived in Escalon no longer wanted to be involved in a mortgage situation. So Leslie and I, considering the options available to us decided that we'd like to search for another house together, in consideration of the growing needs of our family, rather than go through the process of re-financing the existing house with another lender.

So, as the escrow has moved quickly, we've temporarily moved to a property owned by Leslie's parents as we begin the process of searching for a new place for us to live. I remem-



ber, before I even moved out to Escalon, driving with my dear, late friend Andy McQuade, looking at every available property that was affordable in the surrounding communities and in the countryside.

Soon, the right place finally came available. Now, Leslie and I will be doing the same thing together – and we're excited about it.

So, for the time being, as our home phone will no longer be accessible, you can reach me for pastoral calls at: 209-608-5661. Blessings.

PASTOR TROY

## NEW CONSECRATION SUNDAY

### DEAR FRIENDS,

On October 11 we will be celebrating together New Consecration Sunday. To consecrate is to "solemnly dedicate or set apart for a higher purpose." This is a Sunday where we do precisely this – solemnly dedicate and set apart for a higher purpose a portion of our financial resources for the mission of our Church in the world.

### *The Foundation of New Consecration Sunday*

The purpose of New Consecration Sunday is to provide a biblically based understanding of Christian stewardship to our congregation. In particular, this worship service deals specifically with the stewardship of our personal financial resources for the mission of God's church in the world.

Despite the fact that the Bible has no aversion to the discussion of money and its relation to the faith-

fulness of God's people, there is a good deal of discomfort with the subject of the giving of our personal financial resources. A modern American aversion towards biblical discussions of financial matters in the church comes from two different directions (as far as I can see). One, of course, is the abuse of emotional brow-beating often witnessed by television evangelists who are often convicted or accused of financial impropriety. That is to say, people donate money in good faith for a particular mission only to in turn, fund the lavish lifestyle of selfish opportunists. The other, less noticed but no less obvious reason, is American individualism. That is to say, the money I earn is my money and no one – not even God – will tell me what it should or should not be used for.

Our desire to follow biblical stewardship principles requires us to avoid and discourage both attitudes.

PASTOR TROY

On the first attitude we desire financial accountability and transparency and we want any discussion of financial matters to not be “browbeating.” God desires an attitude of the “cheerful” giver to his work. However, though cheerful giving is not encouraged by shaming, it is neither cultivated by passivity. Therefore, on the second attitude, we believe that nothing is ultimately “ours” and God does, in fact, have quite a bit of teaching for us to pay attention to on this subject. All that we have is pure gift from God, which we are entrusted to “steward” for his good purpose. The giving of a portion of our financial resources to the work of the church is deeply biblical and essential to the mission of the church. Therefore, we intend to speak clearly and to challenge God’s people in their giving as it faithfully relates to what God says to us in his word.

The irony for me as a pastor is that though I have discomfort talking about Christian stewardship with other Christians (usually for obvious concern that my motives will be questioned – as I receive my salary through giving), I have no discomfort talking about my own giving. There has been great joy for my wife and I in tithing regularly to the work of this church, and above that, the work of other Christian missions that we believe in. God calls us to give to his work in the world and it is no great sacrifice or generous feat on our behalf to do what he calls us to do. It’s just how we understand obedience to God in response to what he’s already done for us.

### *The Details of New Consecration Sunday*

Our church discusses Christian stewardship specifically once a year. For three weeks leading up to October 11, we will have short introductions to prepare our church family for this event. This preparation is intended to allow individuals and families to pray over what God is calling them to give to the church over the course of the next year. During this worship service we will listen to a biblically based sermon on Christian Stewardship, followed with an opportunity to present a commitment to the church for the next year in the form of a commitment card during a closing offering. Why do we encourage the offering of a commitment card?

First, your private commitment is a public act of obedience to God and support of this church. It is a response to biblical challenge of God’s people to give a consistent portion of their financial resources to God’s work in the world. You and your family decide what that form of commitment will be. You will not be evalu-

ated or questioned on it. Yet a personal commitment is important.

Second, your commitment cards are viewed by one person, our financial officer who already sees and accounts for your regular giving. You can also change your commitment at any time, for any reason, based upon the changing circumstances of your own life and work. This is not a contract, this is a faith-based commitment.

Third, your commitments are essential for us to present a responsible and accountable budget. Without it, Session must pass a budget that is merely a random guess rather than a reasonable expectation. We cannot designate needed financial resources to any of our growing ministries, we cannot continue to update our facilities, and we cannot support our staffing needs without a budget that reflects a reasonably accurate expectation of congregational giving. To merely hope that we can meet our ministry goals is not a responsible and transparent way to operate.

Following our worship service we will have a meal together to celebrate our continued, collective support of the mission of this church in our communities and to hear the fruit of this event. We want you to prepare as an individual or as a family for this worship service with prayer, with discernment, and engagement with the Bible.

We are fully aware of uncertain financial times – and intend to be supportive of all our church family enduring struggling times. Yet, in a time when churches are cutting budgets in large numbers and laying off staff, often the result of risky budgeting and inflated income projections – our church has stayed the course remarkably well over the last year. This is because of the faithful and committed giving of our congregation *alongside* of a responsible budget that was formulated as a result of last year’s New Consecration Sunday. We invite you to join us again this year for New Consecration Sunday, October 11, where we commit ourselves not only to our church’s present mission, but to its continued future as well.

In Christ, Troy J. Onsager