

READING

*And now, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but **they gave themselves first to the Lord** and then to us in keeping with God's will. So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us – see that you also excel in this grace of giving.*

I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:1-9)

'FIRST TO THE LORD'

- the primacy of generosity, of giving
- the priority of the local church

GROWING

through commitment to

- spending time reading God's Word
- spending time with God in prayer – listening as well as speaking
- spending time with other believers through one of our small groups

As we read and apply God's Word to our lives, as we allow his Holy Spirit to guide us through the dialogue of prayer, and as we share that reality with other believers, we begin to grow into the person God designed us to be – in fact, to become more like Jesus.

SERVING

through giving your time and gifts to one of our many ministries.

We believe that God gives all Christians gifts to use within each church family, so that we can serve one another and our community in different ways. When you first join, we encourage you to enjoy simply being part of things here and getting to know others. Once you feel ready, we would love to talk with you about how your own unique gifts and talents can be used for God's glory in this place.

In what ways is the Lord asking me to serve in **htcd** this year?

GIVING

*through regular, sacrificial giving to the ministry of **htcd***

As we grow in commitment to Jesus and his church, the Bible challenges us to support the mission and ministry of our own local church fellowship with our money. Apart from our clergy stipends, everything we do and every facility we use has to be funded by the church family. The most helpful way to give financially is through our planned giving scheme.

Take some time to read through 2 Cor 8 & 9, and also the little booklet, 'What the Bible *really* teaches about giving', which gives details of how to respond. Is your giving what it should be?

SERVING & GIVING MYTHS @ htcd

- this church is so well resourced, it doesn't need my help / money
- with a large paid staff, they don't need my help (and what do those staff do, anyway?!)
- there are so many calls on my giving these days, from all over the world – and many of those causes seem far more urgent and needy
- I don't like giving into some general pot
- It's a shame we can't give to something specific
- It doesn't make any difference whether I serve in or give to any of the ministries here

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Healthy things grow – the seven characteristics of healthy things

- 1 Movement**
Nicodemus – John 3:1–21; 7:45–52; 19:38–42
 - How have you 'moved on' as a follower of Jesus Christ in the last week, month, year?
- 2 Respiration**
'Breathe on me, breath of God' (Gen 2:7; Job 27:3; 32:8; 33:4; Lam 4:20; Ezek 37:1–14; John 20:22)
 - Read Lamentations 4:20. In what sense is the Lord's anointed (Jesus) your 'very life breath'? Read Ezek 37:1–14. Do you need reviving by God's Spirit?
- 3 Sensitivity**
'Here is a boy ...' – John 6:9; Gal 5:25
 - Read Gal 5:25. What does it mean to keep in step with the Spirit?
- 4 Nutrition**
'Not by bread alone' (Matt 4:4)
 - What is feeding your soul at the moment? Share anything you have found filling with the group.
- 5 Excretion**
Matt 18:8–9; Rom 6:11–14; Heb 12:1; James 1:21
 - What needs cutting out of your life at the moment?
- 6 Reproduction**
1 Cor 9:19–23; Acts 8:26–38
 - When was the last time you led someone to faith in Jesus Christ? How many non-believing friends do you have? How often do you see them?
- 7 Growth**
Eph 4:11–16
 - Healthy things grow. How healthy is your walk with God today?

Paul Langham, January 2010