

**Series: *BLING! BLING!* February 18, 2007**

**THE MYSTERY OF GIVING AND RECEIVING  
Luke 6:38**

**I. INTRO**

- A. When Lori and I moved to Emporium, Pennsylvania, it seemed like **everyone** had a garden! And, of course, the pressure was on for **us** to have one. So we did. We roto-tilled this little 10X15 piece of property in back of our house—and I began to learn some **amazing** things.
- First—that when you plant cauliflower—guess what you get? **Cauliflower!** Unbelievable.
  - Second—that if you plant **one** row of beans and **two** rows of peas—guess what you get? **One** row of beans and **two** rows of peas. I was astounded.
  - Third—if you plant **nothing**, guess what you get? **Weeds!** Actually, **weeds rule.** Weeds rule over beans, corn, cauliflower, broccoli, carrots—and anything else you plant.
1. What's even **more** fascinating is that **Jesus** knew this! Really! 2000 years ago. **Whodathunkit!** In fact, they had a catchy little slogan for it. **You reap what you sow.** In our terminology. You have to eat what you plant! Or, you **only** get to eat what you plant! Or, you may not **want** to eat what you plant!
  2. Having done a little planting, I have huge respect for those first settlers that came and cleared and planted this piece of property we're sitting in the middle of right now. Imagine being right here—200 years ago!  
-And this wasn't someone's hobby garden, where, if nothing grew, or the deer and rabbits ate it—you would **still** eat. NO! They had to take really good care of it—because not only was the land a means of having enough to eat—it was a means of having cash in your pocket.
  3. And one of the things that every farmer, especially back then, had to learn was—**you've gotta keep part of the harvest to plant NEXT year!** I don't know how much that was—let's say it was 10% of the corn or wheat. And if you got greedy, and said, "I'll worry about next Spring when it comes" and ate all the seed... Well, you might not make it the next year.
- B. The Bible was written at a time when **everyone** understand these images. You will harvest what you plant! If you plant bad stuff, you get bad stuff. If you plant a little—you get a little. If you plant a lot and don't take care of it—**weeds and rodents rule.** Listen to this image Paul uses to describe giving:  
**Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. As the Scriptures say,**  
"They share freely and give generously to the poor.  
Their good deeds will be remembered forever."  
For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you. Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous (2 Cor. 9:6-11 NLT).

1. Even though Paul, the author, was a city-boy tentmaker, **he** understood the principle of the harvest. Most of us are city people who think veggies grow in plastic bags, ready to microwave. But, really, we get it. Our struggle isn't to understand what this is saying. It's not even **believing** what it's saying. It's living it.
2. Now, does it make **sense?** I mean, could I describe to you this morning—from A to D—precisely how it works—you give, and you receive? No. To be honest, giving looks like you're throwing money into a black hole. It **doesn't** make sense. But it **works!**
3. So, today you're going to have to make a decision about what you **really** believe about God, what you **really** believe about you, and what you **really** believe about giving. And what you're going to do about it. Is that fair?

## II. THE LID

- A. I've been a tea drinker for a **long** time. I need to tell you—Canadians know how to do tea right! Why would **anyone** want to do the bag and string thing with lukewarm water when you can do...the **TEA POT!** To make tea—you need hot water and tea leaves—and a **pot!** You have to get the stuff into the pot. So, teapots have lids! **I love this country!**
- Giving actually starts with having **something** to give, right? Years ago I spoke on generosity. Right after the message, a new follower of Jesus came up to me with tears in his eyes and said, "I felt so **bad** about what you said! We would **love** to give something back, but we're behind on our bills and our credit cards are maxxed!"
- I've had that conversation many times since. And since then, debt—especially credit card debt—has gotten worse. Now, I'm going to make some assumptions.
- \*I'm going to assume that everyone here has a good work ethic. That you're willing to work hard, give it your best shot, and not sit on the couch and wait for a perfect job.
- \*The second thing I'm going to assume is that everyone here will do **whatever is necessary** to work.
1. But getting over-extended financially is a huge issue—where what you owe is sucking the life out of you. Sometimes this happens because of an unexpected crisis.
  2. But for a **lot** of us—it's the **spending** that gets out of hand. You fall in love with a house or a car or a boat that, to be honest, maxes you out—and then consumer debt starts squeezing the joy out of life.
 

-Anyone see the recent news story about the guard dogs protecting an orchard in Malaysia? They kept disappearing. Eleven of them to be exact! Then they found out why. It was a 23 foot python, as thick as a tree trunk, that was eating them!

-We live in a world where the snake has eaten the guard dogs! This huge, sneaky predator called **credit card debt** will swallow you whole!
  3. The coup de grace is something called the **minimum monthly payment**. On a credit card bill, there's the total—and then the **payment** you make to keep them off your back.
 

-Ever done the math? The average Canadian has \$8500 in credit card debt. If they said, "No more debt" and made the minimum monthly payment of \$189—guess how long they'd pay—and how **much** they'd pay? Answer: 7 ½ years--\$8363! Friends, credit care debt is a monster python that **eats** the guard dogs!

-It's not just the credit card debt. It's buying houses and cars and other big ticket items we fall in love with as well—and really, really smart, capable, creative people end up as debt-slaves. The book of Proverbs in the Bible says: **The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender (Prov. 22:7 NIV).**

-If you're in debt—and the water's getting deeper and deeper, I would urge you to not wait for a windfall, or for Aunt Clara to pass away—but **get out now!** Come up with a plan to deal with your creditors and pay them off, go on a prolonged spending diet, get in a home and a car you and afford and get out now. We have capable people here who can help you come up with a plan.

- B. Let me talk briefly about a plan. You need to know—this isn't original with me—but it **works**. Bill Hybels is the first person I heard talk about it this way—and you may have heard me refer to it. It's the **10-10-80** plan.
1. Here's how it works. You take the first 10%—your tithe and give it to God. A few weeks ago, we talked about the fact that God owns everything, right? When we give this part to what God is doing in the world—it is pleasing to Him. And you need to understand—**financially—it works!** It's clear from teaching all through the Bible that if you want to see God's blessing on what you have—this is important.
  2. Then you take the next 10% and put it in savings. Remember what I said about how surprises come—and can take you down financially? Well, you have to put money away for the surprises in life—plus retirement. Plus, there's an alternative plan to **buy now—pay later**. It's **pay now—buy later**. Get interest working in your favor—not draining your account. You'd be **shocked** at what 10% of your income can turn into over 20 or 30 years.
  3. But the **main** thing is to live on 80%. How many of you think this kinda just happens? It won't. You need a budget; a spending plan. You figure out what the 80% amount actually is, figure out where the money needs to go first—mortgage, gas, utilities, groceries—things like that—and develop a plan to spend that much and no more. And then keep track of it.  
-Think of a budget like this. Anyone here interested in having a big pipe coming into your basement that shoots water all the time? How many of you think it might make **more** sense to have pipes that carry the water everywhere it needs to go instead of you doing that? It's called **plumbing!** A budget is plumbing—with money!
  4. Now. We want to help you with this. We're going to be holding a fantastic seminar called **Good Sense** on Saturday, April 14—and this could be a great help to you. This involves some homework on your part—then some really practical hands on teaching and help for managing your personal finances. Sign up in the lobby!
  5. Here's the deal. To **make** tea—you have to have something in the pot. And God offers **His** help and blessing to obedient people!

### III. THE SPOUT

- A. Without a spout, a teapot is just a jug. A container where things spoil.
1. A spout makes a statement, "What's in here is **supposed** to come out." Let me tell you what I believe after years of watching people and studying what the Bible has to say. I believe that selfishness and self-centeredness may come naturally, but it is from the dark side of human nature and **never** results in something good.  
-Friends, we were created in the image of a God who's incredibly generous. That means we were created with a **spout!** To be generous; to give back. I believe that is the way God has put this whole planet together—that when we give, we're blessed.

2. Ever heard the question, “**What gives...?**” Well, actually, **everything!** Generously. Apple trees know that the point of growing an apple is not to cling to it year after year—but let it go. And that the seeds in it will grow **more** trees. Most of what we have comes because the earth keeps giving. Gold. Silver. Platinum. Jewels. Iron. Petroleum. It’s amazing when you think of it.
- A **spout-ectomy**—which is what happens with some people then they want to clutch their money and stuff—leaves them crippled. Part of maturing is learning to **give!** And it all points back to the **Ultimate Giver. God.** He loves...and He gives. Not just stuff—He can create stuff—gold, cars, computers, skyscrapers—just by **thinking** about them. He gave us what was ultimately most precious to Him; His **Son.** Then He gave us His **Spirit.** And He gave us His **Home—Heaven**—simply for the asking. Want to be like God? You **can’t**—unless you learn to **give.**
3. Know why that’s hard? Because we’re born into sin—and we’re born clutching. Hands closed. If you doubt me, test the grip on a new born. Urban legend has it that a baby can grip your finger so hard you can lift it off the blanket. They must be doing exercises in there—squeezing stuff. Incidentally, when a woman’s giving birth—she has the same kind of grip! Lori’s always asking me to open jars for her, you know? I was holding Lori’s hand in the final stages of labor—she lifted me **right off my feet; brought me to my knees!**
- We clutch toys as kids, Game-boys, bicycles. We cling to boyfriends and girlfriends as teens—then steering wheels. Then we get this death grip on our money and stuff—like it will save our lives—like it will last forever. And sometimes the **only** time we let go is when someone pries our cold stiff rigor mortis hands off of it and buries us.
- Why? If we were made to give, made in the image of the **Ultimate Giver**—who **commands** us to be generous—to love God and others with our money—why would we ever let it make our decisions, blind our eyes and harden our hearts?
- a. I think we see it as the key to pleasure and contentment. As if the **answer** to discontentment is more.
- b. And maybe we’ve somehow missed the fact that we are the great creation of a great God—loved, treasured, beautiful. We’ve believed a lie—that our worth lies in how much stuff we stack around ourselves—compared to others, of course. **He who dies with the most toys wins!** There’s a better bumper sticker than that, by the way. **He who dies with the most toys is STILL dead!**
- c. But I think the greatest problem is **fear.** What if I don’t have enough? What if I run out—die old, sick and poor? Know what God wants? He wants us to live a life where we ultimately depend on **Him**—not how much we stack in a little fort around us. Anyone remember the prayer Jesus taught? “Give us our **daily** bread...and with it, of course, enough money to buy enough bread for 10 lifetimes because, God, **honestly,** you might just forget and let us starve!” No. Enough bread for a day.
- Friends, the fear that drives the paranoia about money—and the hoarding—is **not** from God. Let’s be clear about that. It’s just plain old garden-variety, steal-your-peace fear. Want to live like that? On this subject, Jesus said:
- “So don’t be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom. “Sell your possessions and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the**

**purses of heaven never get old or develop holes. Your treasure will be safe; no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be (Luke 12:32-34 NLT).**

-Do you see what He's saying? God isn't begrudging about this. It gives Him **great** happiness to **give us the Kingdom!** Jesus says, "Be extravagantly generous! There's **more where that came from!**

- B. Know what I'd have to say—from my experience? Money is **highly** over-rated. Friends, it **just doesn't deliver** on the security, happiness, contentment and self-image it promises. Now, let's just be honest. How many of you would **agree?** And this is not a test of spirituality.

-Yet, from my experience—this whole giving...**spout...**thing is the single most resisted teaching of the Bible. In the Early years of the church, there's a story about a whole army being converting to Christianity. When they were baptized, they were told to keep their sword arm from going under the water. I sometimes wonder if that happens with our money. "God, of **course** I'll give you my soul, my problems, my sins, my needs, but please, please, **please** don't ask for any of my money!" And to be honest friends—God doesn't get cheated, **we do!**

1. This is where the rubber hits the road in what I really believe about God. And what **you** believe about God. Let me read a portion of what I read earlier:

**And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others (2 Cor.9:7-8 NLT).**

-Jesus put it like this: **Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back (Luke 6:36 NLT).**

-The Book of Malachi, after warning believers about robbing God of the tenth that belongs to Him, basically quotes God as saying, "Why not **try** obeying? What do you have to lose?" And then this challenge: **Bring all the tithes into the storehouse...If you do," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test (Mal. 3:10 NLT)!**

2. So. With promises like these, **what's the problem?** Why don't more people at least take God up on the challenge? "Go ahead! **Try** it. Take the challenge! Take the plunge!" Why **not** do it? I'll tell you why. It doesn't make sense! We think, "Come **on** now! **I** know how money works. Ten dollars minus ten dollars...equals...**zero!**" So we say **no** to the God who gave us **everything!** And we do a **spout-ectomy.**

-Giving, friends, is always an **act of faith.** Faith that **choosing** to be a Giver like God is a good thing. Faith God **blesses** a cheerful giver and opens the windows of Heaven. Faith that Jesus is telling the truth when He says, "Give and your gift will be returned to you in full—and then this extravagant imagery; **pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap!** So. We have to choose; is God cheap and stingy—trying to trick us? Or is He way more generous and faithful than we'd ever dream?

3. I need to tell you—I've tried it—over a long period of time—and it's **true!** The blessing of God on giving is unexplainable—but predictable. I graduated from

college and seminary and post-grad school **debt-free!** When Lori and I started out—making \$165 a week, our furniture consisted of rocking chair and a bed. In 30 years of marriage Lori and I have spent less than \$5000 on furniture—and we have a **house-full** of it. Apart from our mortgage, we have no debt—and we have **more** than we need.

-Can I explain it? No. But I'll tell you what I **have** noticed. Every person I've met who tithes tends to say something like, "God has blessed me **so much!**" And those I've talked to who don't tithe typically say something like, "I can't **afford** to tithe." Think about that for a minute? "Blessed...can't **afford** to tithe...Hmmm!" I think Forrest Gump would say something like, "I may not be a smart man, but I'm gonna tithe. And that's all I have to say about that!"

4. And God is **very** clear about why he asks us to do this. The Bible says in Deuteronomy 14:23: **The purpose of tithing is to teach you to ALWAYS PUT GOD FIRST IN YOUR LIVES (Deut.14:23 TLB).** Now, there are questions that always come up on this issue of giving a tenth.
  - a. One question I've been asked is, "Should you tithe from your gross income or from your net income?" Well, it depends on whether you want God to bless the gross or the net.
 

-I believe that we need to be really careful not to get cheap with God. I think we need to tithe from **all** of our income streams—cheerfully. Think about it like this. Jesus said, **for with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.** How do you want God to measure blessing out to you—with a teaspoon or a shovel? This isn't some tit for tat game God plays. God blesses a **generous** heart and an **honest** heart. When we try to cheat God in little ways—we've missed the whole point of **giving in FAITH!**
  - b. So—**what does God do** to measure back to us? Cheque's in the mail? Rich aunts who die—may God rest their souls. I can't fully explain it—but I think it comes in an unlimited number of ways. It could be through an extra unexpected income, or a car that lasts really well, or a sense of release from the karma of endless upgrades. One of the most **amazing** ways He blesses is by giving peace, contentment with what you have, and a release from comparison and fear.
  - c. There's another huge question. What if I can't pay my bills now? Should I still tithe? Well, I think you need to make it your goal to get rid of any consumer debt you have—a.s.a.p. Bottom line.
 

-One thing I would urge you to do is look at lifestyle issues. Cell phones, health club memberships, eating out, paying for a new car or boat. Look at your priorities!
  - d. There's another big question that comes up for those who are married. "Should I tithe if my spouse is really, really opposed to it?" I don't believe God ever intended our giving to break down our marriages over giving. Let me pass on the advice of Larry Burkett, a man who's been doing financial counseling for a long time. He suggests that you say to your partner, "Would you be willing to at least try tithing for six months? And if we're not better off at the end of that time—I'll stop bugging you about it." Then leave it in God's hands.

### III. THE HANDLE

A. Know what the most important part of a teapot is? The handle. You may make **fantastic** tea, and have a **big** spout. But the **handle** gets the tea where it needs to go. And the bottom line money/giving question for you and me is—who's got the handle—you or God? If you've got it—there **is** not handle. It's been sawed off! Have you ever, in your life, turned the handle on what you have over to God?

-When money is totally in our hands, it does and **unbelievable** amount of damage. It's behind wars, murders—it's behind most marriage break-ups. Why would it be surprising that people would claim all their stuff as their own and slap God's hand when He asks for the handle? Money **is** the God of this world—and friends, let's be honest, if you won't place it in God's hands and honor Him with it—it's pretty important in your life. In fact, it may be your god. Just so you know, when your controlling your money is more important than pleasing God—it puts you in the danger zone of trading more for it than you'd ever dream. People trade their values, their morals, their marriages, their relationship with their kids and their friendships for it **every single hour of every single day!** It is a **powerful** influence!

1. I know. Turning the handle of the pot over to God is a **really** big deal. Jesus said that you can't serve **both** God and money. You have to decide. Remember what Deuteronomy said about the purpose of tithing? **The purpose of tithing is to teach you to ALWAYS PUT GOD FIRST IN YOUR LIVES (Deut.14:23 TLB).**

2. See, it always comes back to trust. Who do you trust? I mean, let's be honest—who owns what you have? Jesus taught, **God owns; we manage.** If that's true, then it should be obvious—shouldn't it? How many of you have a professional person who manages your investments? How would you feel if you found out that they claimed it for their own and had been buying cigarette boats and homes in the Bahamas with it? This is called theft; embezzlement. Do it—and you'll do time in prison.

-People do that all the time with what God has **loaned** them. God doesn't kick them around. Doesn't hunt them down, come knocking on their door. In this life, it can look like we actually get away with it. But we don't. In every one of Jesus' stories where He points out this principle, **God owns, we manage**, there is a final accounting. And there is for us, too. And when there is, we will see what **could** have happened, the good that **could** have been done, the lives saved, the people changed. And in stark contrast to this, friends, will be the way we've wasted it on ourselves—all the junk we bought that we had to leave behind. So. Who holds the handle on your life and on your money—you, or God?

3. You know who, statistically, has the most trouble turning the handle over to God? In Jesus' stories—it was those with **mega-bling**. Jesus made the comment one day, "It's easier for a camel to take a flying leap through the eye of a needle than a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven." The **Kingdom** friends, is the **sphere of God's reign and leadership.**

-Why? Money gets worshiped in this world. It makes your opinion sound more important. You begin to believe your own press. In our world, money opens doors, makes headlines. To just hand control of that totally over to God?

-And I think that's why according to **every study**, people with a lot of **Bling** give proportionately **way** less than people who have just a little. Ironic, isn't it, that people who really could afford to give a lot away—don't.

-Many of us here have worked very hard, managed money well, and made a significant amount of money. There's absolutely nothing wrong with being

wealthy—if you leverage it right. Wealth can be an amazing tool—but **only** when the handle is clearly in God’s hands and gets directed where He wants it to go.

-When we make a lot, even being obedient with a tithe seems like a big deal cause it seems like a **lot**. Like an affluent guy who had become a follower of Jesus.

When he heard what the Bible said about tithing, he said to a friend, “I made \$500,000 last year! That means giving \$50,000! I can’t afford to do that! Would you pray with me about this?” His friend said, “Sure! I’d be glad to! ‘Heavenly Father, I pray that you would lower my friend’s income to where he can afford to give!’”

-See, here’s the deal—when we get to hold more in our hands here, Jesus said that **more** will be required of us. When we move into the category of **much more**, well, our accountability rises to the **much more** level. Friends, we have more than 99% of the world! Let’s just be crystal clear on this: God hasn’t placed it in our hands so that we can become the ultimate consumers, gold plate our lives, and throw the leftovers to God like He’s the family dog!

B. Want to know about the blessing of the handle? Everything God touches—He blesses. It’s **better** than the Midas touch—cause he actually turned his food and family to gold. What **God** blesses comes to life! Really.

1. When you turn the handle over to God, slowly but surely He starts to fill your heart with contentment. More and more and more money and stuff doesn’t help you—if you can’t be content; if you can’t have a heart that’s at rest and filled with love and gratitude. And **that’s** what the blessing of God brings.

2. God’s blessing also gradually frees your heart from worry and fear. A **lot** of people get worried and fearful about their money—and then they get **obsessed** with protecting it—keeping the predators and Revenue Canada and the relatives away from it. Angry when anyone touches it. Friends, when your life and your future and your stuff is all in **your** hands—it’s **not** in good hands. Because you don’t know the future. You’re not smart enough. You may be really, really, **really** good at reading money markets—but you **don’t** know the future. And you can find **rest**—the **rest** of all this stuff ultimately becoming **God’s** responsibility.

-As I see it, we have two choices; the **rest and peace** of knowing that, with God’s help, we are investing what we have in a way that will last forever. Or, the craziness and worry of us trying to figure out how to make what we have last for this life—with a big question mark over the **forever** part.

3. I’ll tell you what **can** happen—if you’ll turn the handle over to God. God can take the resources we have and use them to transform the lives and eternities of people who will last forever. That’s what Jesus was talking about when He told his followers to put **God’s** Kingdom first; to store their treasure in **Heaven**, not here.

-There are a lot of great causes in our world, friends. The environment. Saving endangered animals and rain forests. Finding cures for AIDS. And **especially** the causes that feed the hungry, ease suffering, offer people hope—basics we mostly take for granted. But the best gift is Jesus. Forgiveness. A transformed heart. Eternal life—the gift Jesus died to give to **every** person. And that is at the very **heart** of what this church is about.

-When what you give enables that transformation to happen in someone’s heart—it just keeps going, touching more people, more situations than you would **ever** imagine. And that transformation continues after **they** die and after **you** die. And, from everything the Bible teaches, one day in eternity **they** will know who gave what. And **you** will know what happened. Imagine **that** kind of blessing coming

from ordinary old money that we buy pizza and Starbucks coffee and cell phones with!

-But it takes faith to see it. No one can ever please God without faith. If you and I are ever going to use our money the way God intended, we will have to life our eyes **way** higher than SUVs, bigger houses, nest eggs, cottages, boats, computers and the **millions** of things there are in our world to spend money on. And **God** will need control of the handle. See, because when God's hand is on the handle, his hand is also on the **lid**—to pour more in, knowing that it will glorify Him, and not us.

#### IV. **CLOSING THOUGHTS**

So. Now it's decision time. And I want to ask you; have you ever—**ever**—in your whole life—held everything you have in your hands, all the titles, investments, money, things—up to God and offered to Him. **All** of it—to do what He wants with. **Will** you? Would you do that today?

-Remember, we follow one who gave up everything so we could be rich; who died with his hands nailed open. Will you live responsibly with what you have so that you have something to work with? Will you live with a spout—a **big** one. And will you let God have the handle?