

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE WEEK OF: JULY 13, 2008

SERMON SERIES TITLE: PROVERBIAL WISDOM

REV. JIM COONS

WEEK 2 OF THE SERIES

“The Repertoire of Forgiveness”

Scripture

Proverbs 10:12

Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.

Matthew 6:5-15 ⁵ "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹ "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰ your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us today our daily bread. ¹² Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' ¹⁴ For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Notes:

When we encounter a pure act of forgiveness like we saw in the fall of 2006 when the Amish in Nickel Mines, PA forgave the shooter who killed six of their children, it takes our breath away. It can be inspiring, but it can also seem almost offensive because we want justice to be served! This week we are being challenged by God's divine wisdom to be forgiving, just as Christ was forgiving. This Proverb sets up a contrast between hate and love. Hate in this context takes on the nature of holding on to the wrong others do to us, but love lets go and forgives. Lest we forget, our ability to forgive originates from God's "massive forgiveness" in Christ at the cross.

Questions For Further Reflection

1. Describe a time when you were forgiven. If you can't recall a time, tell about a time when you saw forgiveness in another person.
2. Define forgiveness. Does it require repentance on the part of the wrong-doer? Why or why not?
3. One author said, "Forgiveness is almost a single-word summary both of the Christian gospel and of the Christian ethic." (Brunner, *Volume 1, The Christbook, Matthew 1-12*, p.257) Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. What are the benefits of forgiving someone who offends or hurts you?
5. What are the liabilities of NOT forgiving someone who offends or hurts you?
6. How are love and forgiveness connected? Give an example.
7. Forgiveness is a lot of work. In fact it is a process that often takes time and the entire community. The Amish in Nickel Mines were well aware of this fact:

"Genuine forgiveness takes a lot of work –absorbing the pain, extending empathy to the offender, and purging bitterness- even after a decision to forgive has been made. Amish people must do that hard work like anyone else, but unlike most people, an Amish person begins the task atop a three-hundred-year-old tradition that teaches the love of enemies and the forgiveness of offenders. An Amish person has a head start on forgiveness long before an offense ever occurs, because spiritual forbearers have pitched in along the way. Like a barn raising, the hard work of forgiveness is easier when everyone lends a hand." (from *Amish Grace*, p.140)

How can your small group help one another build your "repertoire of forgiveness"? How can our church help build this repertoire?

8. Who is someone that you need to forgive? What steps can you begin to take in order to achieve this important and wise work?