

Iron Sharpens Iron

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 January 2011

Preacher: Aaron Hoak

[0:00] Please turn with me in the book of Proverbs to chapter 27. They disregarded the potential discomfort that a conversation like that could bring.

They were kind enough to share those concerns directly with me. And so instead of hearing a rumor third hand, instead of hearing these things from others, I got the concern straight from the source. And difficult as hearing things like that may be, and if you've ever had a friend that's been good enough to do that for you, you know it can be difficult, painful sometimes.

It was refreshing. And it was sharpening. I wonder if anyone here has had the guts to have a conversation like that. To sit down with someone and to share your concerns about them. Or if you've been the recipient of those faithful wounds of a friend. If you have, then you know that when Solomon says in Proverbs 27 and verse 17, as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

[1:41] You know it's true. You've found it to be true. Because people have sharpened you. And hopefully, by God's grace, you've been used to sharpen them.

Three things this afternoon. Iron sharpens iron. Men sharpen their friends. And you need to be sharpened and to be sharpening. We start with iron sharpens iron.

We know this by experience, by observation. It would have been a familiar picture for the Israelites who had to sharpen swords for war and plows for cultivating.

There was a time when the Philistines didn't allow the Israelites to even have blacksmiths. They had removed the blacksmiths from the land. And we read in 1 Samuel 13, because that's where you went to have your sword sharpened.

And so 1 Samuel 13, 19-21, not a blacksmith could be found in the whole land of Israel because the Philistines had said, otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears. So all Israel went down to the Philistines to have their plowshares, mattocks, axes, and sickles sharpened.

[2:48] The price was two-thirds of a shekel for sharpening plowshares and mattocks and a third of a shekel for sharpening forks and axes and for repointing goats. The point is, if you wanted to sharpen those iron instruments, you went to a blacksmith, a guy that had iron, and that could do that work of sharpening.

Israelites knew what it meant for iron to sharpen iron. Metal on metal has a sharpening effect. Now, maybe some of you kids have a pocket knife. I had a pocket knife when I was a kid, and I would spend hours taking sticks and whittling them down to a point.

You can sharpen wood with metal if you want. You get a real sharp stick. Or maybe some of you have a sharpening stone for some of your knives in your house. I had a Swiss Army knife.

I used it on the sticks. And when it got dull from sharpening too many sticks, I had a sharpening stone that I never took care of and never oiled like I should, but sometimes a stone can sharpen. But most often, iron.

Other metal is used to sharpen iron. Maybe some of you kids have seen your dad out in the shop, out in the garage, and he's got the lawnmower blade and a vice, and he's taking a file to it, sharpening that blade.

[3:53] Iron on iron. Sharpening it. Bringing it to a point. At our house, we have a set of cutco knives. And someone who will remain nameless brought them to the marriage.

And they're part of our family now. And they're fabulous knives. They really are. But if you know anything about cutco knives, you know that they're very, very sharp.

So sharp that they've almost removed the end of my wife's finger. They've almost removed all of one of my fingers. And I've got the scar to prove it. Very sharp knives.

And they're dangerous, but they're good if you know how to use them properly. It's a good clean cut, she says. It's easy to heal. I said, if it had been a lesser knife, it wouldn't have gone all the way to the bone.

But we digress a bit. Anyway, a couple of years ago, the knives weren't as sharp as they used to be. And so we sent them off to cutco.

[4:56] And they have a free sharpening service for anybody who's bought their knives. So we sent them off. And they returned freshly sharpened, ready to remove more fingers or whatever else.

And I've never been to where cutco makes their knives. I've never been to somebody that sharpens cutco knives. But I imagine that in my mind, it's this place full of iron.

Because they're the sharpest things I've ever seen. And so to get them that sharp, they must have sharpening irons that they take those knives to and get them sharp, sharp, down to a point, down to a fine edge where it'll slice just about everything.

So somebody took our knives there. They put them to iron and they sharpened them. And all that to say is that iron sharpens iron. If you want something sharp, you take it to iron.

And shave off tiny little metal filings until there's a nice fine point. So iron sharpens iron. Solomon says, Okay, Israelites say we know that. We get that. We understand that. You all understand it.

[5:57] But in the same way that iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. So one man sharpens another. It actually says, so one man sharpens the face of his friend.

It's not just one man sharpens another man. He sharpens the countenance or the character or the very person of his friend. It's not just a random guy here and a random guy here run into each other and they sharpen each other.

These are friends. They're people that know each other, that spend time together, that love one another, and the man sharpens his friend. It's a fact.

That's what we notice, first of all, when we talk about men sharpening their friends. It's just a fact. It's not a man should sharpen his friend or will sharpen his friend or if he really loves him, he'll sharpen his friend or he might sharpen his friend.

No, he just does. That's a fact. If you have a friend, they're having a sharpening influence on you. Now, that can be for good or for bad. You can be sharpened into the wrong sort of thing, into the wrong sort of person.

[7:01] In Israel, there was a call at times to beat their plowshares into swords and the other way around. Their swords into plowshares. But typically, if an Israelite sent his sword down to the blacksmith, you know what he wanted to get back?

He wanted a sharp sword back. And if he had gotten a sharp plow back, he wouldn't have been very happy. At our house, if we had sent our knives away and we had gotten back some very nice, very sharp garden tools, somebody in the house wouldn't have been very happy because they were sharpened into the wrong thing.

You can be sharpened by good and bad friends. And so your friends, they're having an influence on you. They're either making you more of what you ought to be, a sharp, careful follower of Christ, or they're sharpening you into something that you shouldn't be.

A worldly follower of Satan. Kids, it's why your parents watch the company you keep so closely. And if you spend a lot of time with these people over here and you get back from them and your parents notice that you're the better for it, you're more Christ-like, you have a sweeter attitude around the house, you think they're having a positive, sharpening influence.

And they're not going to have a problem if you want to spend time with those people. Or, you're spending time with this group of people over here and the more time you spend with them, the more they see that they don't like.

[8:21] They're having a sharpening influence too, but they're making you more and more like the world around you. And they'll begin to limit the time that you spend with them. Because regardless of who you spend time with, they're having a sharpening influence on you.

The question is, what are they sharpening you into? Into more and more of the image of Christ or more and more of the mold of the world? And so friends sharpen friends, whether for good or evil. We want to think about sharpening for good today. Making you more of what God wants you to be. How does that happen? How do men sharpen their friends? We know how it happens with iron on iron. You take iron and you shave off some of what you want sharpened.

How does that happen with people? Well, there has to be contact, first of all. You're not going to sharpen somebody that you never talk to, that you never see, that you're never with. If I have a knife here and a sharpening iron here, and the knife stays here and the iron stays here, it's never going to get sharp.

They've got to come into contact for that sharpening to take place. And so it is with friends. They've got to be together, whether it's by phone or email or face-to-face or whatever form of communication.

[9 : 29] There's got to be contact. But assuming that there's that contact, how do men sharpen their friends? Well, Proverbs gives us some hints, doesn't it? You can sharpen someone by rebuke or by faithful wounds.

Notice verses 5 and 6 of the chapter we're already in here. Proverbs 27, verses 5 and 6. Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

Sharpening is done when friends see problems, concerns in your life, maybe even sin in your life, or an area that simply needs some improvement, and they're willing to tell you so.

Now, rebuke and wounds aren't exactly words that conjure up images of friendship, but maybe they should. Because that's what a good friend will do.

And this sort of thing, a rebuke, a wound, it'll hurt. You can imagine if a knife had nerve endings, that it would hurt having little shavings of metal file.

[10 : 30] That would be painful if a knife had nerves. And so it will be for you to have someone point out flaws, concerns that they have. Knocking your rough edges off is going to be painful.

It'll hurt. But it's good for you. Rebuke and faithful wounds are one of the ways we sharpen our friends. It's the spirit of Matthew 18 where the right thing to do when your brother has sinned against you is to go to him and to show him his fault.

That's sharpening. It's what Paul was to Peter. Peter had taken the Gospel to the Gentiles. He was the first one. To Cornelius. But later, Peter begins to slip.

And he begins to say that the Gentiles have to be circumcised. He begins to add things to faith for salvation. And so Paul confronts him. He didn't just let it go. He said, I don't want to confront Peter. He's an apostle.

I don't want to have this conflict. I don't want him to think bad thoughts about me. I don't like conflict. No. We read in Galatians 2. What does he do? Galatians 2.11 When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he was clearly in the wrong.

[11 : 36] When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the Gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it then that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?

Now the Gospel won't always be at stake. It won't always need to be a public thing where Paul had to rebuke him in front of these people that he had been living in front of. It doesn't have to be that way always, but Peter needed some sharpening.

And Paul was willing to do it by God's grace. What a blessing to have a man like Paul to give us that rebuke when we need it. You can also sharpen someone by rebuke or faithful wounds.

You can sharpen by earnest counsel. Also right here in Proverbs 27, look at verse 9. Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart. And the pleasantness of one's friends springs from his earnest counsel.

Earnest counsel is a way you can sharpen your friend. You can advise them. You can point them to the Scriptures. And you can show them the truth and how it applies to a particular situation. And that is one of the joys of friendship.

[12 : 40] The pleasantness of one's friends springs from his earnest counsel. It's what Jonathan did for David. 1 Samuel 23, verses 16 and 17. And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God.

Jonathan helped David find strength in God. He was sharpening him. And listen how. He said, don't be afraid. My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel and I will be second to you.

Even my father Saul knows this. He comes with earnest counsel, a word of encouragement, a word to stir him up and David, through Jonathan's sharpening influence, finds strength in God.

So you can sharpen by earnest counsel. Maybe a combination of rebuke and earnest counsel. And there's pain and joy involved in it. You can imagine that when Apollos, Acts 18.26, when he began to speak boldly in the synagogue.

And then when Priscilla and Aquila heard him. And they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. It's probably both painful for Apollos and joyful.

[13:48] Painful because he saw that his proclamation hadn't been complete. There was something missing. It wasn't quite right. And he was sorrowful likely that he had not had the full truth, not proclaimed it as he ought.

But what a joy to have someone set him on the right path and to say, here's how you can do that. There's rebuke. There's earnest counsel there. And it's painful, but it's joyful for him.

Something like my encounter that I told you about. Some of those things hurt, but it's good. You see how things can be improved. And that's a blessing. So there's rebuke. There's earnest counsel.

Perhaps both together. You can sharpen someone by encouraging them. Think of the passages in Hebrews. Hebrews 3.13, But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

What a way to sharpen somebody. Part of sharpening is not being hardened by sin's deceitfulness. You don't want to be led into sin. You want to avoid sin. And if that's going to happen, you need somebody to come alongside you and encourage you and encourage one another so that you won't be hardened.

[14:52] That's a sharpening encouragement because it's keeping you from sin. Or Hebrews 10.24 and 25. Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds.

Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing. But let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the day approaching. Did you hear that? Spur one another on to love and good deeds.

That spur, that's a sharpening influence. A spur in the side of the horse will send it running faster than it was before. And a spur in your side, a sharpening influence on you will send you towards love and good deeds.

You can sharpen by encouraging. This was the kind of friend Job was. Now Job, he needed some good friends.

And mostly what he got was some lousy counsel from his friends. But in that poor counsel that he gets, we learn what kind of friend Job was. And I've never seen this before. I think Charles Bridges drew it out when he was talking about this verse.

[15:55] But Job 4, verses 3 and 4 say this. And this is one of his friends talking to him. Think how you, Job, how you have instructed many, how you have strengthened feeble hands.

Your words have supported those who stumbled. You have strengthened faltering knees. Man, I'm glad that I have some friends like Job. I hope you have friends like Job that have strengthened feeble hands, that have instructed you, that have supported you when you fell, that have strengthened your faltering knees.

Job was a good friend. An encouraging friend. Paul didn't just give sharpening. He was sharpened by others. He had friends like this.

Acts 28 and verse 15. The brothers there heard that we were coming and they traveled as far as the forum of Apius and the three taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men, Paul thanked God and was encouraged.

He knew these men. He had seen them before. And now just the sight of them was an encouragement to him because they had had that encouraging, sharpening influence on them. Or 2 Corinthians 7.6, Paul writes, But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus.

[17:08] Did you catch that? God comforted us by the coming of Titus. God took Titus in his hand and he used them to be a sharpening, comforting, encouraging influence on the Apostle Paul.

You know, that's what you are when you sharpen with a friend, when you rebuke them, when you encourage them, when you challenge them, when you teach them, when you instruct them. You're an instrument in God's hand to sharpen them, to make them better, to make them more like Christ. Just like Titus was for Paul. So you can sharpen by encouraging. You can also sharpen by example. You sharpen your friends when they watch and learn and imitate.

And you're sharpened when you watch them and learn and imitate. And remember, sharpening influence can go both ways. It can be good or bad. And Proverbs talks about the negative influence of example. Proverbs 22, verses 24 and 25.

Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man. Do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.

[18:14] You see, by example. You're with him. And you see him always losing his temper. And you know what? Eventually you're going to start losing yours. You're going to fly off the handle just like he does. And you've learned by example.

And they've sharpened you, but not for the better. For the worse. And so your influence, your example, can be a way that you sharpen. And one other note about having that influence on your friends.

It must be done with tact. Here in Proverbs 27, verse 14. If a man blesses his neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse.

Sharpen with tact. Do it with appropriate demeanor and timing. There will be a good time to encourage your brethren. And a bad time. A good time to give a rebuke. And a time that's not appropriate.

Use discernment. Because a blessing early in the morning when your friend is sleeping will be taken as a curse. So do it with tact. So you can give rebuke or faithful wounds, earnest counsel or both, encouragement, example, and always with tact.

[19:19] These are ways that you can sharpen, have a sharpening influence on your friends. Or they can have that influence on you. And wasn't Christ the model of this?

He doesn't just let His people go without sharpening us for good. If we're purchased by His blood, then shouldn't we be living as He did? Shouldn't we be sharpened into Christ-likeness?

Yes. Yes. And we find that He helps us along the way in that very process. In His Word, by His Spirit, through human instruments, He makes us into what He wants us to be.

We see that as He labors with His disciples. He doesn't just let them go on in their ignorance and in a weakness, but slowly, surely, He sharpened them, taking them from the men that we see in the Gospels that aren't really that impressive in a lot of ways, to the men that we see in the book of Acts that are remarkable.

And a lot of the things that happened in the book of Acts couldn't have happened unless Christ had taken the time to disciple them, to sharpen them, to work with them. We see examples of it throughout the Gospels.

[20:35] Just a few. Luke 12, 22 and 23. He encourages them. He speaks to their problem of worry and He says, Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear.

Life is more than food and the body more than clothes. He talks about how God will provide for these things. A sharpening word of encouragement and challenge to them as they had been worrying that they need not.

And so they begin to learn. When He detected pride among His disciples, He didn't just let it go and avoid the conflict. He knocked off those rough edges. Mark 10, 43 and 45.

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant. And whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve. And to give His life is a ransom for many.

So He encourages them with His words and then He gives them the example. He shows them how to be humble, how to be a servant. He takes a towel and He wraps it around His waist and He washes their dirty, stinking feet.

[21:35] Oh, He was sharpening them. Making them more into the servants that He wanted them to be when He did that. Luke 22, Simon, Simon, Satan is asked to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail.

And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers. Sharpening Simon there right in that moment and then expect Simon to be a sharpening, strengthening influence on the others when he's been restored.

And He takes the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself. He instructed them. He taught them.

And they asked each other, were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road? Opened the Scriptures to us. That burning in their hearts is a sign that Christ had come and sharpened them and showed them more of the Scriptures.

Without Christ, we're just a bunch of dull nothings. And of course, we know that He went to the cross that all of our rough edges, all of our sins might be forgiven.

[22 : 41] Not only does He give us the grace to knock off those rough edges to become more like Him, He's made the way of salvation, of forgiveness for all the times we haven't been like Him.

Without that, we have nothing. There's no hope. We have no strength to sharpen, no willingness to receive a sharpening influence without our Savior Christ.

And so, we see that iron sharpens iron. A man will sharpen his friend. And so lastly, this afternoon, are you sharpening and being sharpened?

You must have a good sharpening influence on your friends. You are having an influence. The question is, what sort of sharpening are you doing?

People should be the better for knowing you. It doesn't mean that every conversation has to be full of rebukes or faithful wounds. It does mean that when such are needed, you're there to humbly and gently deliver them.

[23 : 43] You acknowledge your own shortcomings. You make sure the log is out of your own eye, but you give the advice, the counsel, the rebuke that's needed. If all that someone can say of your friendship is that they sure do have a good time with you, then there's something missing.

There's nothing wrong with having a good time together with your friends. That's good. We enjoy it. And even sometimes that can be sharpening. We encourage one another by that. But if that's it, then there's something far short in your friendships.

There's no sharpening going on, no encouragement, no praying together, no discussing the Word of God together, no seeing God's perspective on the world's events that are happening all around us.

If there's none of that sharpening, that conversation that's encouraging and uplifting and with a point, if there's none of that taking place, then you're not being the kind of friend you should be because a man will sharpen his friend.

And so speak words of encouragement. Point them to the Scriptures when they face difficulty and trouble. When they mourn, mourn with them and show them how those in the Scriptures mourn and did it with Christ and how they had hope because of Christ.

[24 : 55] Be a faithful example before them. Live the kind of life that's worth imitating. Sharpen your friends. You need to sharpen others, but you also need to be sharpened.

Do you have the kind of friends that have that influence on you of sharpening you for good? Again, it's okay to have friends that make you feel good, but if that's all you have, then you're missing out. Seek friends that will have that good influence on you that will strengthen you, that will make you better, that will make you more like Christ. If you're surrounded by yes men and they just affirm everything that you do, good job, good job, that's great, and nobody ever points out your flaws and your faults, you might think you don't have any.

But you do. You need friends that are willing to point them out. Have people that are there that are that brave, that are that bold, that are that loving, to not just let you go on in your foolishness, but will put their finger on it and help you knock that rough edge off.

And if you've got friends like that, be thankful for it, but you have to know how to receive it. It's one thing to have friends like that, somebody that will tell you, but if you're not ready to receive it and you throw it off, you say, I don't want that.

[26 : 11] I want your rebuke. You're wrong. You don't see me accurately. You've got blind spots. They probably do see you accurately. If you're not ready to receive that, then it won't be any good to have friends like that.

So how do you receive that sharpening influence? Psalm 141, verse 5. Let a righteous man strike me. And what does he say next? I want no part of it.

Get him away from me. No. Let a righteous man strike me. It is a kindness. Let him rebuke me. It is oil on my head. My head will not refuse. It's a blessing.

I'm going to receive it as a blessing. We'll be thankful for it. Proverbs 25, verse 12. Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear. It'll make you beautiful.

Somebody offered you a beautiful piece of jewelry. Ladies, would you reject it? I don't think so. I think you'd take it. And so if somebody comes to you with a rebuke, are you going to reject it or are you going to receive it?

[27:07] Say, you know what? In the long run, it's going to hurt. It'll be painful. But it'll make me more beautiful. It'll make me more like Christ. And so receive it like the blessing that it is. It'll be painful.

It'll hurt. Sometimes. But it's good for you. It's like having surgery. You've got a heart problem. All the arteries around your heart are clogged.

And if you don't have surgery, your heart's eventually going to stop. And you're going to die. You're going to be sick. And you say, yeah, but surgery's going to hurt. They're going to injure me to get to my heart.

They're going to cut me wide open. And that's going to do damage. And it's going to be painful. But you know what? If they don't do that damage, if they don't do that surgery, if they don't cut you open, you're going to die a whole lot sooner than you might.

Then if they do that damage, they'll open up, they'll fix your heart, and then they'll close up that wound. And eventually, that wound will heal. And you'll be the better for it. You'll be the more healthy, the stronger, the more able to live for Christ.

[28:09] And so, nobody at least in their right mind, with the potential of many years of usefulness ahead, is going to say, you know what? I don't like the idea of a painful surgery, so I'm going to pass.

Will we just be as foolish to resist the rebuke of a friend? You know what? I don't want the pain. I don't want to deal with that today. But you know what? It's going to make you better in the long run because you'll be sharper for it.

Don't refuse it. If your friends are the sort that are sharpening you for righteousness' sake, thank God for them. And thank them for the influence they have.

But if you have friends that are the sort that are sharpening you for purposes of wickedness, then you need some new friends. Your mom and dad are right when they say you're hanging out with the wrong crowd and you need to get rid of them.

Because they're going to sharpen you right into hell. Right into worldlings that look just like the rest of the world. They're having a terrible influence on you. Get away from that kind of influence.

[29:10] It will destroy you. That's not the kind of sharpening you need. Make sure you're surrounded by the right kinds of friends. Well, what sort of friendships are being cultivated at Grace Fellowship Church?

Are they just sort of surfcy, chatty, friendly, but no substance, no content to your fellowship, no sharpening going on?

I hope not. I trust rather that we'll be pursuing real, true friendships that are deep and abiding. The kind where we're willing to wound one another and receive those wounds where it's needed.

A friend will sharpen the countenance, the character of his friend. Be that kind of friend. Have that kind of friend. And be thankful most of all today for Christ, who is the truest and most faithful friend. Unafraid to come to us in the pages of Scripture and wound us. Show us our faults. Show us our shortcomings. Here's the mirror that we need to look into and see the rough edges that need to be knocked off. Christ, the best of all friends.

[30:20] Praise God for Him. And if He is not your friend today, He can be. He can save you and set you on this way and befriend you all the way home to glory. If you would come and trust in Him today.

It's only in His strength and by His Spirit that we can be the sort of friends we should be. And so let's remember and praise and be thankful for this Christ today. Let's pray together.

Lord, we pray for grace to soften our hearts. We pray that You would teach us to love. To love You as we ought and to love one another as we ought. To show our love by being faithful friends that give faithful wounds and earnest counsel and encouragement.

Friends that sharpen one another. Make us to be that kind of people. Make our relationships to have substance and depth. Make us to profit from our relationships to become more like Christ for having spent time with one another.

May we not be wasting our time when we fellowship over lunch, when we gather on the Lord's Day to worship and to bear one another's burdens. To talk and to rejoice together as friends.

[31 : 30] Make our friendships profitable so that You might be praised. So that Your kingdom might come and Your will might be done on earth as it is in heaven. Do these things, we pray, for Your own glory.

And we thank You for Jesus, that great friend of sinners who loved us when we were unlovable, who has been sharpening us ever since. He brought us to faith in Himself.

And will take us safely home, making us more and more like Himself until we are like Him when we see Him as He is. We long for that day when we will see You, our Savior Christ, face to face.

And be like You as You are. Until that day, give us grace to walk in this world becoming more and more like You. More obedient to Your Word. More faithful to Your truth.

Give us help. Make us faithful servants, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.