

## **What Is the Meaning of “Iron Sharpens Iron” in Proverbs 27:17?**

There is an interesting and perhaps convincing illustration of both friendship and accountability found in Proverbs 27:17, “Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (NASB).

In Old Testament times, one iron blade was used to sharpen another blade until both became more effective tools.

This visual aid of a common implement of work or war provides a practical model for many human relationships.

We can see the connections to life and in that, this verse and the principles it contains becomes quite useful and life related.



### **Iron Sharpens Iron: A Principle of Relationship**

The concept of “iron sharpening iron” obviously implies at least two pieces of iron.

It would be impossible for one tool to become sharper without the presence of the other.

Left alone, both blades would be dull and quite useless.

This simple Proverb illustrates an important biblical principle.

God expects us to live and serve in a community of other believers (see Hebrews 10:25), and He desires for us to build loving and growing relationships with others (see 1 Thessalonians 2:8).

The process of helping someone else improve their effectiveness absolutely requires a positive relationship.

Earlier in this same chapter (Proverbs 6:4) it says, “*Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.*”

We know this concept to be true.

It is much better to accept Godly advice or even constructive criticism from someone we know, someone we love, and someone we know that cares about us, than it is from a stranger or simple acquaintance.

We want to know that the person giving us the counsel has our best interest at heart. Friends may indeed “*wound*” us at times, but we can understand and appreciate their genuine motives.

Conversely, the “*kisses*” from enemies fall flat and we can imagine their devious hypocrisy.

That’s why it is so important for each of us to build growing relationships with others in life.

We all need people who can help us rub off the hard edges and who honestly have our best interests in mind when they do it.

There are times when these sharpening conversations, even from loving friends, can come across as harsh, mean, or judgmental.

But it definitely helps to know that these people care and that they have a genuine interest in helping us improve.

## **Iron Sharpens Iron: A Principle of Accountability**

“Iron sharpening iron” also requires a level of accountability – or a personal inclination to allow significant others look close enough into our lives so that they can see the specific weaknesses or problems areas.

Accountability is not just simply asking another believer what Bible verse they read this morning in their devotional time.

That’s too easy; and it almost assumes the recipient of the question would be dishonest in an attempt to take the pressure off the examination.

Exchanges like this often are seen as trite and superficial.

Genuine accountability demands that the person receiving the counsel or advice is willing to allow the friends to look for the vulnerabilities in their lives, to accept what they point out, and then do something to fix it when they hear it.

These first two principles are important to apply together.

We need the close relationships with other people we trust and respect – to give them the consent to identify weak areas of our lives and then to address those areas with us.

This is not just giving anyone the permission to go around with a critical and negative attitude that delights in pointing out the faults of others.

The principle of accountability must mean that helpful and real conversations grow out of growing, loving, and constructive relationships.

## **Iron Sharpens Iron: A Principle of Motivation**

Let’s look at Proverbs 27:17 again, “*Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.*”

This select Old Testament proverb contains an object of the sharpening action. One person can be used by God to help the other.

The incentive here was to be mutually beneficial. Both pieces of iron work must together to accomplish the desired intent.

That was the motivation. Both items needed sharpening.

This leads us to a very valuable component of growing close personal relationships with other people.

Relationships are never to be a one-way street. God-honoring, inter-personal connections are designed to help both parties grow in Christ-like maturity.

Again, this process is not just pointing out perceived weaknesses in someone else. This sharpening must come with a heart-felt desire to help the other person and in the process receive some input that leads to personal improvement as well.

## **Iron Sharpens Iron: A Principle of Willingness**

The final principle also works in cooperation with the preceding one.

Yes, both parties should want what is best for each other; but to build on that concept, there is an additional step.

Whenever a good friend sincerely wants to help us grow and it is obvious that they truly want what is best for us, then it is imperative for us to accept their counsel, advice, or constructive criticism with an attitude of willingness and acceptance of what they are telling us.

It also behooves us to do whatever specific things we need to do improve.

There are times when even the most well-meaning friends can point out weak, even dangerous trends in our lives.

However, that person, no matter how close of a friend they are, may not understand or know what exact things that should be done to fix the situation.

That's why situations like this should drive us back to the life-changing truth of God's word.

## **The Holy Spirit Convicts and the Word of God Sharpens**

God can use the "*wounds of a friend*" to sharpen us, motivate us, and to provide some accountability for our lives.

However, true victory and lasting progress comes only from God Himself. Hebrews 4:12 says, "*The word of God is alive and active.*

*Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."*

The familiar verses in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 shed some light on this, "*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*"

Notice the progression steps in this text. Biblical principles are "*profitable*" for "*doctrine,*" or the systematic teaching of God's Word, but God's Word is also beneficial or helpful for three other things "*reproof, correction, (and) instruction in righteousness.*" God can and will use the "iron sharpening iron" process of good friends to help us in our walk for Him.

But, most certainly God will use the convicting power of His Holy Spirit and the word of God to rebuke us of the sinful and harmful practices in our lives.

But God never just points out weaknesses without providing a solution. God's word will help us "correct" the problem and will provide the step-by-step "instructions" we need to go on living "*in righteousness.*"

The “iron sharpening iron” process that Proverbs 27:17 provides is indeed a helpful and maybe even convicting part of a believer’s life.

We must highly value and build Godly and growing relationships with other Christ-followers who can exhort us to a closer walk with Him, but these relationships and the resulting conversations and discussions must drive us back to the Word of God where our loving and gracious Heavenly Father gives us true life-changing strategies.

If your Church has a program on this subject matter, would you please reach out to us, so we can refer people interested in this course of study that live in your area to your Church please.

If your Church doesn’t have a program on this subject matter, and you would like to start one, please reach out to us, and let's team up and Win Souls for Christ!

Rev. Jesus Del Rio, Ed

WE POST (M-F) AT 9:00 P.M. (EST)

Remember: Keep Jesus, 1st Place in your life and HE will take you places that you’ve never dreamed of ... Pastor John O’steen (RIP)

**Friends, you can be a very nice and good human being, but THE ONLY WAY TO HEAVEN, IS BY REPENTING OF YOUR SINS, AND ACCEPTING CHRIST JESUS, AS LORD AND SAVIOR.**