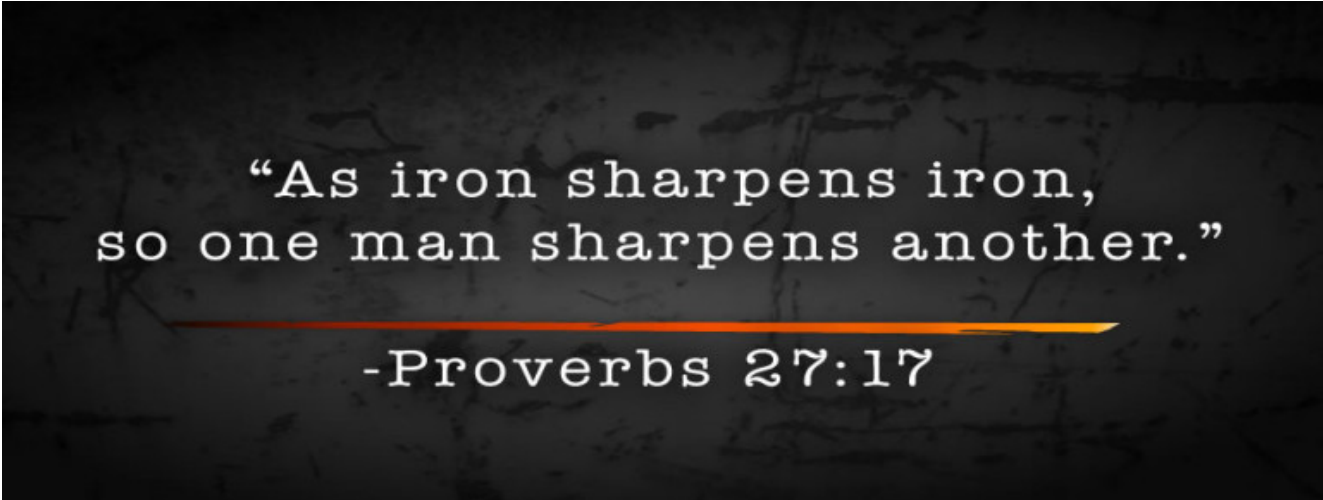


Men “Sharpen” Men

Now that I finished the previous set of posts on **Traits of a God Buddy Relationship**, I’m going to write a series about what I have found as some of the foundations to my God Buddy concept.

The first is my favorite Bible verse: Proverbs 27:17.



“As iron sharpens iron,
so one man sharpens another.”

-Proverbs 27:17

I first discovered the power of being involved in the men’s group at our church during my personal struggles with work-life balance (which I wrote about in **Why I needed a God Buddy**). Not only did participation in the group get my mind off of the stressful job situation and help me through this struggle, but it also led to finding **my original God Buddy**, Bill Johnson.

It was in that same men’s group that I began to learn some biblical concepts that helped my journey as a man and the realization that men need to have other godly men in their lives.

As we studied the Bible, this particular verse in Proverbs stuck with me: *“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”*

To better understand this verse and how it became the baseline for my God Buddy concept, let me provide a short lesson in what is called “Metallurgy”.

Definition of Metallurgy

According to Dictionary.com, Metallurgy (met·al·lur·gy/'medl,ərjē/) is the branch of science and technology concerned with the properties of metals for their production and purification. Said another way, it is the art of extracting metals from their ores and modifying the chemical, physical, and atomic properties and structures for other uses.

Now that you get the science, let's get into the biblical background.

Historical Context

Before 1200 BC, bronze was the primary metal in the Middle East since ancient technologies were insufficient to create the temperatures needed for melting and working harder metals. For instance, the melting point of bronze was only 950 degrees celsius, whereas copper melts at 1,100 degrees and iron at 1,550 degrees.



So, for more than 2,000 years, bronze remained the metal of choice since it was a significant step up from the stone tools and weapons used in earlier times. However, bronze was relatively soft and doesn't hold an edge well since it is composed of copper and tin.

Near the end of the Bronze Age (the historical period from 3000 BC – 1200 BC characterized by the use of bronze, and other early features of urban civilization), there was dramatic upheaval in the Middle East that included invasions, wars, and the collapse of whole cultures.

Both the Philistine and Israelite people had migrated to the land of Canaan but the chaos in the region had disrupted the trade routes, which created a worldwide shortage of tin and therefore a scarcity of bronze. There was plenty of iron ore around but the Philistines had monopolized the technology to

extract iron ore and they dominated Israel and other nations.

Over the next couple of decades though, Israel came into possession of the technology for the new-found skill of iron-making and –sometime near the age of King David, began making iron weapons for themselves. By the time of David's son, Solomon and the writing of the book of Proverbs, the making and sharpening of iron swords was a national endeavor that helped enable Israel's' military independence.

Mechanics of Iron-Making

The basic mechanics for the reduction of iron ore is a thermochemical reaction called smelting, wherein the mass of rock containing iron oxides and silicates is heated so those impurities –or the weaker, less valuable parts of the ore are melted out of a spongy mass of iron known as a “bloom”. The bloom is then hammered while still at a white-hot temperature so its gaps are essentially welded shut to make a solid piece of iron.



Once there is a solid piece of iron made from the bloom, the process of sharpening is then carried out. This is a three-stage effort:

1. Pounding the welded bloom with an iron hammer flattens the edges and breaks off the weakest parts.
2. An iron file or iron-ore stone is used to create an edge that is nearly sharp.
3. Another piece of refined iron is then used to rub and lift that edge to make it razor-sharp. This was done again and again whenever the edge of the sword became dull.

Sharpening a tool or weapon took time in the ancient world since there were no electric whetstones or sharpening devices as we have now. It required a persistent and careful striking of the tool against a sharper one time and time again until

the desired result was achieved.

Essentially, iron production is the transformation of jagged, rusty rock that has its impurities removed by a lot of heat and some hammering.

As you can see, parallels to Proverbs 27:17 for deeper friendships are very apparent.

Some Men are No Longer 'as Sharp'

My belief is today men need some mature men in their lives in order to help them become better men. When guys spend time together, there is incredible refining and sharpening that occurs as we learn from each other.

One man does not sharpen another with just one talk over a cup of coffee or by sitting through sermons each Sunday. Instead, men sharpen one another over time, through years of friendship, and by working through the ins and outs of enduring relationships. This proverb also underscores the importance of persistence in a GB friendship.

You have heard the saying that "He's lost his edge." This means a man has become dull in his life and blunt in his approach to many things. But like a knife that needs to have its edge raised again, the Word of God is a "double-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12).



God Buddies refine and sharpen each other over time by offering words of encouragement and providing constructive criticism at just the right moments. When we fellowship and study the Bible together, it helps us get through the “heat” of life and provides the accountability and encouragement to help us remain sharp. This refining may require some hammering and heat but the transformation helps shape us into being more Christ-like and the earthly man that God intended.

Do you have any favorite Bible verses that apply to deepen your friendships? Who are the “irons” in your life who help sharpen you?

If so, feel free to share your thoughts in the comments.