

Living a Sharpened Life - Proverbs 27:17

Introduction

If you've ever stood near a blacksmith's shop, you will recognize it immediately. Why? Because of the metal striking metal. The sparks flying. The intense pressure. The friction. And the heat. Especially the heat! When a blacksmith is at work, it's not quiet. It's not gentle. It's not comfortable. But to get the desired result, all those extremes are necessary. A dull blade will not cut. A dull tool cannot serve its purpose. A dull edge cannot accomplish the work it was made to do.

Proverbs 27:17 gives us a powerful truth: *"Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another."*

The New Testament echoes this principle on many occasions. Living a sharpened life is not optional for the believer. And when you consider the whole counsel of the Bible, you'll soon discover that "being sharpened" is commanded, modeled, and expected. Afterall, who likes a "dull" Christian?

The Sharpening Process

Sharpening Requires Contact

In ancient times, sharpening a blade was more difficult than it is today. Usually, another piece of iron was used. Two pieces of iron must touch; they must come together; they must be close enough to interact for the sharpening process to work. When I think about this and how it relates to today's verse, it suggests that spiritually, you cannot grow in isolation. Growth occurs when God's people are together.

Hebrews 10:24–25 says: *"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another"*

You cannot be stirred up from a distance. You cannot be sharpened from the sidelines. Christianity is a contact sport. It is a community endeavor.

Sharpening Requires Friction

Iron doesn't sharpen iron through soft touches. It sharpens through scraping, grinding, and applying pressure. Likewise, God uses honest conversations, accountability, correction, and sometimes disagreement to shape us.

Paul says in **Ephesians 4:15**: *"speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ"*

Truth often creates friction. But love will make fruitful friction. Some of the most important people in your life are the ones who tell you the truth. They tell you the things you didn't want to

hear but desperately needed to hear. Hopefully you have people in your life that speak truth to you.

Sharpening Produces Heat

When iron sharpens iron, sparks fly. Heat increases. The process is uncomfortable. Growth is sometimes uncomfortable too.

Galatians 6:1–2 teaches: *“Restore him in a spirit of gentleness... Bear one another’s burdens.”*

Restoration involves friction. Burden-bearing is heat. But those things are working to sharpen us and mold us into Christlikeness.

God sometimes uses discomfort to refine us:

- A brother in Christ who challenges your habits
- A sister in Christ who confronts your attitude
- A mentor who pushes you to grow
- A friend who refuses to let you settle spiritually

Sharpening is not meant to be painless. It is meant to be productive. It is meant to force improvement. Removing what is no longer useful and allowing the useful parts to shine.

Sharpening Is Purposeful

No blacksmith sharpens iron for fun. Well, some may, but most do that type of work because they can produce something useful. God sharpens you because He intends to use you. God recognizes our usefulness and makes sure we are prepared for the task.

Colossians 3:16 says: *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”*

Teaching sharpens the mind. Admonishing sharpens the heart. Worship sharpens the spirit. Spiritual sharpening is preparation for kingdom work. Living a sharpened life means living ready for God’s purposes.

The Sharpening Community – Who Sharpens Us

God Uses Godly Relationships

Proverbs 27:17 assumes mutual sharpening. Both pieces of iron change in the process.

Romans 15:14 says believers are: *“...able to instruct one another.”*

This means you need people who sharpen you, and you need to sharpen others. Every believer is both a blade and a sharpener. Both serve different purposes, but both are useful.

Sharpening Happens in Discipleship

Jesus didn't disciple the twelve by giving them a book and sending them home. He walked with them. He demonstrated it to them. He corrected them. He challenged them. He encouraged them. He sharpened them. And they learned also how to sharpen one another.

James 5:16 says: *"Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another..."*

Confession is friction. Prayer is heat. Together they help sharpen believers into holiness.

Sharpening Happens in the Church

A healthy church is not just a place where people gather. It can be if it is a place where people grow.

Acts 2:42 show the early church devoting themselves to teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer. That is the environment where sharpening takes place. It's where sharpened lives thrive. A church that avoids sharpening becomes a church full of dull believers. But a church committed to sharpening becomes a church full of disciples living sharpened, Christlike lives.

The Sharpening Challenge – How We Respond

Be Willing to Be Sharpened

Some Christians want comfort, not sharpening. They want affirmation, not accountability. They want encouragement, not correction. But you cannot be sharpened if you refuse these forms of friction. Are you willing to accept the friction? Will you ask God for a teachable spirit, or a humble heart, or just simply ask Him for the willingness to grow.

Living a sharpened life begins with the willingness to be shaped.

Be Willing to Sharpen Others

Sharpening is not criticism. Sharpening is not harshness. Sharpening is not superiority. Sharpening is loving someone enough to help them grow.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 says: *"Encourage one another and build one another up..."*

Sometimes sharpening is encouragement: "You can do this. Don't quit."

Sometimes sharpening is correction: "Brother, that attitude isn't Christlike."

Sometimes sharpening is guidance: "Let me show you what Scripture says."

Sometimes sharpening is accountability: "I'm going to walk with you through this."

Living a sharpened life means helping others live one too.

Building Sharpened Relationships Intentionally

Sharpening doesn't happen accidentally. It happens intentionally. Ask yourself: who sharpens me? Who am I sharpening? Who is God calling me to invest in? Who is God calling me to learn from?

Every believer needs a Paul, a Barnabas, and a Timothy:

- A Paul to mentor you
- A Barnabas to walk beside you
- A Timothy to pour into you

Living a sharpened life means living in relationships that refine you while allowing you to simultaneously refine others.

Conclusion

Sharpening is noisy. Sharpening is gritty. Sharpening is uncomfortable. Sharpening is intentional.

But sharpening is one of God's ways of making us effective.

A dull Christian cannot cut through the darkness. A dull Christian cannot stand against temptation. A dull Christian cannot serve with excellence. A dull Christian cannot fulfill their calling.

But a sharpened Christian, one sharpened by Scripture, sharpened by community, sharpened by godly relationships, becomes a powerfully useful instrument in the hands of God.

So today, let's embrace the sharpening process. Let's welcome the friction. Let's value the relationships God uses to shape us. Let's commit to sharpening one another in love.

Because iron sharpens iron and God uses people to shape people.

This is how we **live a sharpened life**.