



"It is ill for an heir of heaven to be a great friend with the heirs of hell; it has a bad look when a courtier is too intimate with his king's enemies."

—Charles H. Spurgeon

11-Jan-19

Iron Sharpens Iron (Part Three)

In Part Two, we broached the subject of how we can sharpen the countenance of a friend, as [Proverbs 27:17](#) recommends in its illustration of iron sharpening iron. We saw that the sharpening process must begin with closeness or proximity. Without contact—whether it is a knife against a honing rod or friends keeping in touch—nothing can be sharpened.

Taking it one step further, in his July 3, 1993, sermon titled "What Is Prayer?" John Ritenbaugh asserts that our proximity to [God](#) significantly affects how we are developed into His image—that is, how He sharpens us:

Do we realize that, when we pray, we are in the presence of God, and He has the opportunity to rub off on us? It seems so simple as to be almost unbelievable, but it is right. Some of His Spirit reaches out and begins to affect us for good. Prayer is a major tool in our spiritual development through God's rubbing off on us. All the while this is happening, our minds are being subtly shaped by Him because we are in His presence.

Similarly, our interactions with each other every day, whether at home or church, whether by phone, text, email, or even Facebook, work either to sharpen one another positively or to produce a dulling effect. We can encourage, build, help push a friend back to center, and sharpen, or we can tear down and make dull. We do the latter when we fail to consider or show [love](#) to one another in our interactions. Beyond mere interactions, our spiritual conversations with each other can help refine, build, and straighten our views of God and His Word.

Even more difficult, how well do we recognize our need to be pushed back to center? Do we realize that we need, not just an alignment, but a filing to remove the old metal and re-establish the edge so we can be sharpened and polished? Are we able to recognize our imperfection with humility?

As John Ritenbaugh stated, when we come into God's presence through prayer, His Spirit continues to refine us and affect us for good. Being in [contact with God](#) should have a positive effect on our edge: It should re-align or sharpen us as needed. Our interactions with our brethren should be doing similar things for us, and we for them.

Finally, another factor in how we sharpen one another is frequency. In the culinary world, there are many cooks, chefs, and other kitchen workers who view honing a knife blade as something they must do frequently. Some will hone on occasion or according to a schedule. Many will hone their knives right before they cut, while others will hone before and after each use of the blade to keep the tool precise, sharp, and ready for use.

Similarly, ask any tradesman or even handy homeowners how often they file or sharpen the tools and blades they use. If they want to get the job done quickly and efficiently, they realize that filing, sharpening, and honing must be done frequently. If not, the task at hand becomes that much more difficult. The Bible speaks to this point in [Ecclesiastes 10:10](#): "If the ax is dull, and one does not sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength; but [wisdom](#) brings success."

Within our relationships, coupled with the frequency of our interactions, we have many opportunities to hone each other spiritually or even sharpen one another on those rare times when it is needed. In addition to our physical

relationships, our contact with God through frequent prayer provides the best honing, grinding, and sharpening that we can receive.

Sometimes, though, we need a good sharpening, and God must file the old metal away. When this happens, we experience trials that hurt. God must remove pieces of the old man here and there, and in doing so, He reveals a new edge that He can then refine with the whetstone and polish, so we are ready for the tasks He assigns us. With God, the results are always good; He always produces a sharp tool, ready for use.

In contrast, it takes wisdom and [patience](#) for us to be conscious of how our interactions with our friends and brethren affect them. Yes, sometimes a brother will need a good sharpening. If so, we must go to God and determine if we are the one to do it. Once we decide to take that course, we must proceed with love, humility, gentleness, and patience. Other times, he may only need a good honing to keep him aligned. Even so, we must undertake it with care.

We hear [Numbers 6:22-27](#) sung each year as we leave the [Feast of Tabernacles](#):

And the LORD spoke to [Moses](#), saying: "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them: "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.'" So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them."

Recall the effect that God had on Moses when He passed by him (Exodus 34). That contact significantly changed Moses' countenance; his face glowed with the light of God. He had to don a veil because the children of Israel were afraid of him. When God's face shines upon us, it is a sign that we are in His favor, that He is watching over and caring for us. When He lifts His countenance upon us, He is providing His blessing, approval, and peace. The priests were to bless Israel in this way so that God's name would be placed on the children of Israel.

Like any tool, edge, or blade, we and our brethren will at times need our countenances pushed back to center and made straight. At other times, we will need a more thorough sharpening, in which the weight of excess metal must be removed, the edge restored and polished, and our countenance lifted and prepared for every good work once again.

[Proverbs 27:17](#) can help in our relationships within our families, within our circle of friends, and within God's church. It reminds us to think about how our interactions and conversations with each other make a far greater impact than we often realize, and in doing so, it underscores our responsibilities within our relationships. Most of all, it prods us to remember that contact with God helps form and shape us into His image, revitalizing us so that we are sharp and ready for what lies ahead.

- Ryan McClure

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[What Is Prayer?](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Prayer is a tool we must learn to use more efficiently or effectively. God's chief work on this earth is to produce holiness in His offspring, transforming our carnal, perverse nature into God's own image. Because we have the tendency to take on the characteristics of those with whom we associate (for bad or good), we need to be keeping company with God continually through prayer, letting His character rub off on us, developing His mind in us as we learn to shape petitions according to His will and judgment.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Courtesy](#)

by Mike Ford

These days, it seems, everyone demands respect but few are willing to grant it to others. It is a rare event and often worthy of note when someone gives up his seat to a woman or elderly person or when a child responds with proper deference. Mike Ford analyzes this international problem, zeroing in on the Bible's injunctions on the subject.

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