

5 Iron-Sharpening Elements of a Proverbs 27:17 Friendship

According to Facebook, I have more than a thousand friends. Some of them I've never met in person. Many are acquaintances. Some are closer friends.

Then there are the friendships that go deeper. These are the relationships that have stood the test of time. Friendships based on eternal priorities. Loving relationships that truly want the best for the other when "the best" might be a little painful.

These are the friendships that fulfill Proverbs 27:17: "Iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend."

What does this type of friendship look like?

They require good listening skills.

Good listeners take the time to listen. They're not in a hurry and they allow me the space I need to process what I'm experiencing and confide in them when I'm ready. They listen between the lines of conversation—listening as much for what is not said as for what is said. These friends can look me in the eye and know when I'm holding back. This is a skill I need to continue to develop!

They are encouraging relationships.

These friends know when I need a phone call, a hug, or a card. They're the ones who drop me an email to say, "This verse reminded me of you. How are you doing today?" Their encouragement is not flattery, but rather provides the fuel to keep on persevering when I'm weary. It's difficult to encourage others if I'm self-focused.

They provide the opportunity to ask hard questions.

Small talk is nice. Surface questions are polite. But these friends have earned permission to ask questions such as, “What has the Lord taught you since we last met?” Or, “What has the Holy Spirit been convicting you of?” Still, the way we ask those questions can make a huge difference. This is not an interrogation.

They offer the opportunity to give without expecting in return.

These friends give of their time for lunch or coffee or maybe just a phone call. They might send a card or a bookmark—something tangible to remind me of this precious relationship. Still, the relationship is not about the gifts. As the adage says, “It’s the thought that counts!”

They are relationships that include prayer.

Nothing beats the encouragement of being told someone is praying for me. To know that in their intimate time with the Lord, my name is being lifted before the throne of heaven is balm for my spirit. Praying for someone else communicates that this is a friend who is as concerned with spiritual and eternal matters as they are with temporal and physical ones.

This is not just the kind of friend I want to have. It’s the kind of friend I want to be.

How about you? {eoa}

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