

# Iron Versus Iron: Staying Sharp in the Midst of the Battle

✘ Living the Christian life is a journey toward maturity in Christ. That's why Jesus gave His Church a handful of equipping gifts. But the practical aspect of being trained as a skilled servant that moves in rhythm with Christian brothers and sisters, (and husbands, wives, daughters and sons) is not always a textbook experience.

Let's get real for a moment. Silly putty doesn't sharpen iron. Plastic doesn't sharpen iron. Not even sandpaper sharpens iron, although at times you may feel like a fellow believer is aggressively rubbing your soul with sandpaper. No, Solomon in his wisdom tells us that it takes iron to sharpen iron. "Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Prov. 27:17 NASB). That implies pressure, abrasion, pressure, abrasion, pressure, abrasion, and so on until the knife is sharp.

You may be saying, "I don't need to be the sharpest knife in the drawer." Consider the alternative. Any five-star chef, or even a first-year fry cook, will testify to the fact that a knife is useless if it is not sharp. A sharp knife can cut a vine ripe tomato into thin slices suitable for gourmet salads. A dull knife, on the other hand, will simply crush the tomato and ruin your recipe.

The good news is that apostolic metal is as hard as it comes. The bad news is that apostolic metal is as hard as it comes. We need to be spiritually sharp with strong-willed souls set on God's purposes in order to successfully live the apostolic life. It takes a special breed, and a heavy supply of God's grace, to carry the cross over the finish line. Apostolic metal is hard enough to endure the persecution and subsequent

suffering that comes with persisting in God's will.

Any good butcher will tell you that the harder the metal, the longer it will hold its edge. By the same token, the harder the metal of which the knife is made, the harder it is to sharpen. The sharpener has to be made of a material that's harder than the metal in order to grind down the hundreds of tiny saw-like teeth that get twisted and bent out of alignment through repeated use. Butchers and professional cooks give their knives a few strokes on the sharpener before each use.

Indeed, sharpening is a constant process, especially in the apostolic life rife with spiritual warfare. We need iron-like strength that will break, pulverize and bust up the kingdom of darkness. We need an iron-like will to continue to pursue God's will in the face of resistance from principalities and powers. But even with hard-as-steel spiritual traits, our souls can become weary in the day-to-day battle that's not merely against principalities and powers but also against flesh-ours and others' (read: strong-willed children, cranky bosses and nagging spouses).

You can respond in one of two ways during the sharpening process. You can moan, groan, whine, complain, cry, pout and pity yourself and extend your pain, or you can yield to the iron furnace of suffering and emerge as sparkling gold (see Jer. 11:3). Remember, blacksmiths have to put iron into fire to make it malleable before removing it and shaping it with quick repeated blows with a hammer. Who is the blacksmith in your life?

Jesus often uses those closest to us as tools to show us the muck and mire in our souls that are hindering our success. But instead of becoming offended, angry and unforgiving, apostolic living requires us to praise the Lord in the midst of the admittedly often unpleasant sharpening process. Do you have an axe to grind? Humbly iron out your differences with brothers and sisters and watch God work.

Obedying His Word will put that much-needed iron into our souls and take us one step closer to conforming to His image. The psalmist said, "Invigorate my soul so I can praise you well, use your decrees to put iron in my soul" (Ps. 119:175, MSG).

If you allow the Word of God to change (sharpen) you, then before you know it, the overbearing attitude of your sister-in-law or the pushy demeanor of your brother in the faith won't even bother you and you can concentrate on fighting the real enemy. The Word of God is surely sharper than any surgeon's scalpel and cuts the enemy to bits every time when you swing that sword in faith.

Remember the Lord's promise through the Prophet Isaiah to those who trust in Him: "Behold, I will make you to be a new threshing sledge with sharp teeth; you shall thresh the mountains and beat them small, and shall make the hills like chaff. You shall winnow them, the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them; you shall rejoice in the Lord, and glory in the Holy One of Israel" (Is. 41:15-16, NKJV).

Are you ready to become that threshing instrument about which Isaiah prophesied? Submit yourself to the sharpening process at the hands of your five-fold ministers, friends, foes and family—and, of course, the Spirit of God—and emerge from the iron furnace as a razor sharp battleaxe fit to cut through any spiritual opposition. From major trials and tribulations to life's everyday struggles, your fire-tested, apostolic metal will lead you into victorious living.

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