

Proverbs 27:17

Sunday 7/14/2019

Well, if you have your Bibles this morning, as Troy so prophetically predicted, we will be back in the Book of Proverbs today. I have been out of the pulpit for three weeks. I think that is the longest I have ever been out, other than the point when I died and I was gone for a while then. But when I got back, I was okay. Reports of my death were greatly exaggerated. But anyway, three weeks, man, it is a long time. We had Zach through camp, which was great. Then I was in Ohio, and then Bob Gregfield did a great job with a lady with an issue of blood. Last week, we had Jeff Bush, a missionary, and he did a great job. So it was all worth it. I really, really enjoyed you guys holding the line while I was gone and even while I was here.

I. Recap of Proverbs 27:14-16

You remember the last time we were in Proverbs 27:14-16, just a quick recap. We talked about the fake spirituality that is all over the place today, by people, by churches, by false religions. The verse specifically talked about somebody blessing a friend with a loud voice, but in actuality, it was a curse to them. I talked about people with absolutely no depth to them, whose words are a lot louder than their actions. They are always talking about spiritual things, but they are not very spiritual themselves. They are always giving you spiritual advice, but they do not follow any of it themselves.

I talked about how it was about false doctrine and a false spirit, putting out a continual dropping of garbage that looks on the surface like a blessing from God the way it is presented. But in truth, it is a curse. When you follow it and get involved in it, it is a curse to your life, a curse to your family, and ultimately a curse to your soul. We talked about how the world, the flesh, and the devil mimic Christianity in a great way. The world has its churches. The world has its ministers and ministries, just like the Bible says it does in 2 Corinthians 11. Both have doctrine, one false, one true, and then of course, both have a Bible.

We also saw how that wind in the Bible, I showed you from Ecclesiastes 1:6, John 3, and again in Acts 2:2, how that the wind in the Bible is a picture of the Holy Spirit of God. There will be a false wind, the spirit of the Antichrist, that will deceive you. The Bible talks about somebody being blown about by every wind of doctrine. I showed you last week how the Bible said in those verses that the Bible will "bereith" it. I showed you that the word "bereith" is an old English word that means it will uncover it. It will show you what you are really dealing with. It will not allow you to be fooled if you follow the principles of the Word of God, and as the Bible says, by rightly dividing the Word of Truth in 2 Timothy 2:15. When we do not do that, then we wrongly divide it. When we wrongly divide it, then as Ephesians 4:14 says, we get blown about by every wind of doctrine. It was a great set of principles for us who work with people, who understand why in our own lives sometimes we have struggles, and then when you are dealing with people, how to understand better where they come from.

II. Proverbs 27:17 – A Key Verse for Life

Today, for me, I want to talk about one of the greatest verses that you will ever probably understand and follow after the day you get saved, one of the best you will ever find. I was thinking, at the end of our lives probably, we could sum up everything that we learned about God in maybe ten verses. There are going to be special verses. All the Bible is special, don't get me wrong. But you know as well as I do that there are certain verses in there that just mean the world to you. They have gotten you through tough times. They have gotten you through the heartaches of life, and they become a pillar in your life. At the end of life, you look back and you look at those pillars of the Word of God that sustained you through the tough times. I am going to tell you, this is one of those key verses for life that you never want to forget. One single verse that will completely say it all and leave nothing to the imagination.

This verse is in Proverbs 27:17. I know many of you have been waiting for me to get to this point, and I have too, because it is a great verse, and we will see a lot of good things about it today. The timelessness of this verse, here we are getting ready to go to camp, where our church is at with all the folks and all the good people that God has given us. Many of you who are in discipleship or discipleship two, you are learning the stages of spiritual growth, and somebody here is working with you and helping you. The verse is a great verse because it simply states a great truth that I want to really talk about today, and it says in Proverbs 27:17:

Proverbs 27:17

Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

Jim Daris-Stevage, would you stand up and ask God's blessing on the preaching this morning? Thank you, Jim.

III. The Principle of Association

Without a doubt, this is one of the greatest truths that you will ever get, and I try to keep it before you all the time. I think it is something that just needs to permeate everything that we do when we work with people, or we get new families in, or we just try to help one. It is the number one aspect of the last sixteen years since our church has been in existence that I have tried to build into this church. I have said it many times, and you have heard me say it, and we have seen it through Proverbs, we have seen it through all the different aspects of the Bible. Simply, we are who we associate with, and people you hang out with will either make you better or they will make you worse. It is just that simple. They will either help you or they will hurt you. They will either empower you or they will destroy you.

I have heard people say all my life in the ministry, when a person would get into the Bible under a good Bible teacher, a good Bible preacher, and somebody else was not getting maybe what you are getting, they will come up with the old thing, "Well, you are just following a man. You are just following a man." You know what? Dr. Peter Ruckman was a great influence in my life and so many men's lives, and he is dead and gone now. But in his day, anybody who followed his teaching was called Ruckmanites. We think that is something unique. Back in the old days, in the end of the 40s and the 50s, when J. Frank Norris, who happens to be here today, thank you, where is Jaden? Thank you, J. Frank, for showing up today. I tell this story. In school where he

goes to school, they had a thing where you could be whoever you wanted to be, and people would come through, and you dress the part, act the part. They had guys be sports figures. He chose J. Frank Norris, who was one of the great preachers of the day, and you got up there and just really, I am good, man. I tell you what, I like that. The only better you could have been is me. Next year you can work on that.

It is a thing where they called them Norrisites because they followed J. Frank Norris. In the first, second, and third century, they called them Novatians because they followed a guy named Novation. They called them Manicheans because they followed a guy by the name of Mani. They called them Nestorians because they followed a guy named Nestorius. They called John Hus' followers Hussites because they followed John Hus. Here is a guy, then in the 1400s, the whole country, which does not even exist anymore, but the whole country of Czechoslovakia, which he was from, had come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, called his followers Hussites. You had a group that they called Paulicians, and they were called Paulicians because they followed the teachings of Paul, just like we do.

It is a thing where you hear it all the time, but the truth will be, and this is what I want you to understand today, everybody follows somebody. Everybody does. Everybody will be influenced by somebody. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, he said:

1 Corinthians 11:1

Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

So you want to forget the fact that you are just following a man because everybody follows somebody, but what you want to make sure of is that the person you are following, or the people you are following, are the right people in your life, people that will make you better, people that will sharpen you and keep you sharp. Really, that is what it is all about. For you and for me, the key is having the ability to pick and choose the right friends in life, people who are going to make you better. Go with the people who are going to sharpen you and keep you sharp. Somebody said one time, "A child of God who stands and lives the truth will have strong friends and red-hot enemies." A lot of truth to that.

IV. Using Others to Sharpen Ourselves

I know in my own personal life, I have always wanted people in life who make me better. I want people that, in our relationships, we encourage each other, you and me, me to you. I want people that are going to help mold me, sharpen me, keep me on my best game. You want to learn how to use people around you. I do not mean use them in a bad way, but use them around you to make you better.

I will confess something to you. In learning my Bible, years ago, I knew how I could be a sluggard when it came to study habits. I was not very good in school. I hate to say that with your kids around because they are going to say, "Well, Bob was not very good. He brought home all F's, so I can too." I was never very good in school. I bribed my civics teacher when I was in high school to get out of graduate from high school. He wanted something, and I got it for him.

Nothing bad. He wanted a copy of a model state constitution. I did not know what that was, but I called my congressman, and he got me one, gave it to him. He said, "You do not even have to show up for the test. Good job." Because he knew I was going into the military, so he... But I flunked school from seventh and eighth grade, had to go to summer school. I know how my study habits can be. I mean, I am. I was in the sixth grade so long the kids brought me to Yapel. I thought I was the teacher. So I know myself too well.

I knew that if I was ever going to learn the Bible, I was going to need help. So I used you to make me study the Bible and make me better. I made myself accountable to you without you even knowing it. Why do you think years and years ago when I first got into ministry, I started a Bible study on Monday night originally, but then it is Thursday night now, where you could ask me any question that you want to ask about the Bible? You see, I had to face every Thursday night, so I had to stay in the book. You forced me to stay in the Word of God. You forced me because you were going to ask me questions. Honestly, I do not have a problem saying, "I do not know." But if every question you ask me, I just said, "I do not know," what is the point after a while? Let us just go eat. You made me better. You helped me because I used you to do that. It is a thing where you forced me to stay in the book. You held my feet to the fire, and it sharpened me.

I look at the same thing what we do now in people ministry. Our group of people that we meet with, seventy, seventy, eighty, we will get back in this fall where you are working with me with people in the ministry. That once a month deal holds me accountable that I have to, I cannot just slough off. Most guys when they get my age in the ministry, fifty-five, they start thinking about retirement. I will never retire. I have never looked at the ministry as a nine to five job that when you get sixty-five or seventy or whenever it is, you just retire. The ministry is a lifelong calling. But I have got to tell you, the longer you are in it, the more you want to slough off because it is just a natural thing. I do not play golf. Never will, never have. I know many of you are golf addicts. I feel sorry for you. I really do. I have got news for you. There is more to life than chasing a little round ball around. You give that little white ball a gun and let him shoot back at you when you are hitting him, it will change the whole dynamics of that game, I promise you.

Most guys when they get my age, they are looking to get out, get rest, get in the pasture, and just retire. Go move down to Florida, to the dinosaur graveyard down there where all folks migrate and die. To me, the ministry is a lifelong calling. I will do it as long as I can. When I lose my hearing, which is almost there, then I will just yell louder. When I cannot walk anymore, I will sit up here in a stool, and I will just give it to you. When I lose my teeth, I will gum you to death. But it does not matter because to me, you have made me better. It is a thing where it is like the Bible Institute. Those things help me. You kept me from sloughing off and getting stagnant. If you are a parent and you are smarter than the problem, that is exactly what you will do with your kids. You will allow your, you will use your kids to keep you sharp instead of just looking around the world and not paying attention to what they are going through and where they are at. In other words, what I am saying is everything around you, if you use it the right way, will make you better.

V. The Importance of Positive Association

I have to deal with people a lot and a lot of issues with people with problems. There are a lot of negative things and a lot of negative people that they are struggling with. My week is filled with it, but it is okay. That is my job. I will do whatever it takes to help them. There is nobody that ever comes to me that says, "There is nothing I can do for you." It may not work for them, but I tell people all the time when they come to this church, "This church will never hurt you." Now, along with saying that, you may hurt yourself, but we will never hurt you. I will never hurt you. I am here for you. Sometimes they get it and grow out of their problematic world, and sometimes they do not. I try to do what I can do for them.

But I want you to understand, I want to hang out with people who are going to be positive people who always look at the things the way God sees it. I want people who, as the verse says, "iron sharpeneth iron." That is really who I want in my life. Because I have a tendency, I can be, I have got an old nature, I can be just as negative as anybody else. Iron is probably worse than you, because my blood type is B negative. So it is natural for me. I have an excuse I can blame it on. So I know me. I know that virtue as vice can be caught and will be caught by contact. Just like I do not want your flu when you have it. I mean, I know. Somebody say, "I am really not feeling good." I will say to you, "Well, I wish I could take it so you felt better." I am not really telling you the truth. I do not want it. That is what I am supposed to say, to make you feel better, but I do not want it. And I do not want your negativity.

If your Christianity is not contagious, then it is contaminated. I will not allow negative people in my world to the place where it is going to taint me and everything. We always hear the thing, "Well, he or she looks at the glass half full." And then somebody else, they are always saying the glass half empty. I threw that glass away a long time ago. I just drink at the well where the water comes from, the Word of God. That way you always get it fresh and bubbly. You do not have to worry about the stupid glass.

I always follow Psalms 1, where it says:

Psalms 1:1-2

1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

I never forget that progression. It will come into my life and your life. The moment you quit walking with God and you start walking with the counsel of the ungodly, listening to them, pretty soon you are standing with them. After you are standing with them for a while, then you are sitting with them, and you are becoming scornful of everything that God's people is, the Word of God, the church, just like everybody does.

I want to tell you, Romans 14:7 says, everybody will affect somebody:

Romans 14:7

For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

There is somebody always watching your life, and there is somebody that by your action as a child of God, good or bad, you are affecting their life. Sitting here this morning, you are going to take the course of life that you are going to make people better by iron sharpening iron, or you are going to make them worse. Ecclesiastes 9:18 says:

Ecclesiastes 9:18

...one sinner destroyeth much good.

Boy, that is such a true statement.

VI. God's Design for Spiritual Growth

For us as Christians, this is the way God designed our spiritual growth, just three simple concepts.

1. Obviously, the first one is the Word of God, the principles that we follow, the things that God gives us that really helps us put into our lives.
2. The second one is obviously the New Testament local church. That is our accountability structure. That is the church that God has put us in, that we are accountable to it. We have some structure in our lives because we all need structure.
3. The third one is the strong people, the believers who will be examples to us to enter us to help us grow.

Paul said over there in 2 Timothy 2:2 to young Timothy, he says:

2 Timothy 2:2

And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

Iron sharpening iron. You and I taking what God is doing in your life and making somebody else better. When I preached at the Methodist church here a couple of weeks ago back home in Canton, I told you about it last week, I told them. My family laughs at this because I do a lot of stupid things in places, and they, just ask Jamie about the airport and the little dog, she will fill you in on it. But I told them, I cannot change with the Word of God everybody's life. I know that my life will not impact everybody's life, some it will, some it will not. But that does not stop me from wanting to come to the point that every person I meet, I want to leave them better than I found them. I just want them to be better than I found them in the sense of maybe just encouraging them in something, telling them that they did a good job in this, telling them this, telling them that.

It is one of those things where people will never improve or grow without good models and examples. It is the way God designed it. Sure, He gave us the Word of God. Sure, He gave us the New Testament church. But that is why He gave us each other. I want to tell you something, sometimes in Christian life all we have is each other. I mean, I know we have the Bible and I

know we have this church, but the church is made up of people. There will be times in your life when you go through something really tough that the only thing that will keep you up along with the Bible is the people who will hold you up. It is a key thing.

That is why, tying it all together, that is why character studies in the Word of God are so vitally important. The camp theme is going to be overcomers, helping these kids get to the point where they overcome what kids go through today. But a good dose of overcoming is good in all of our lives because we all struggle with things. That is why not only did God give us each other, but He put the great models and examples in the Bible which we call character studies.

Now, I do not know what you know the Bible or what your level of spiritual, and it is okay, but you are going to find that in the Word of God God specifically mentions seven people. Those seven people, He sets them apart and He tells us that those seven people are the models for us. Now there are lots of models in the Bible. You could just about go anywhere. Bob used a great one when he was preaching about the woman with the issue with the blood for twelve years. That is a great example. Zach used some great examples. But God specifically, I mean, I guess I can say this, if you just wanted, if you only had seven people to study in the Bible, forget everybody else, only seven people to study in the Bible, if you got these seven people that God specifically said, you want to look at them, follow them, and let them be an example in your life and they will sharpen you, it would be these seven guys. He said that in Jeremiah 15:1 and Ezekiel 14:14.

- The first guy He talks about is Noah. If you want to learn how to overcome the world, then you want to follow the example and a model of Noah because Noah overcame the world.
- The second one would be Moses. If you want to learn how to serve God, then you study Moses. He is the greatest example of a servant of God anywhere in all of the Bible.
- Then you have Abraham. If you want to learn how to walk by faith, study Abraham.
- Then you had Samuel. If you want to really understand the ministry of what it is, study Samuel's life.
- Then you had David. If you really want to understand the Word of God and what it should mean to you, study His life.
- Then you had Job. Job was up against the devil himself. There is going to be times that you feel that way. If you want to find out how to do that, then you study Job.
- Then you have Daniel. If you have trouble with the flesh and you have trouble struggling with the flesh, Daniel is your guy.

God tells you that you learn from their example. You learn from examples of people in the Bible who will sharpen you, but you will also learn from people in life that you associate with that will sharpen you. Mal Sabaka, Peter S. Ruckman, Jim Lake, Truman Dollar, Harold Hennigar, Glenn Mayes, Herb Coots, they were all men who sharpened me one way or the other.

Yet I say that, and I want you to understand this, nobody is perfect. You are never going to find anybody that you follow that you cannot find something wrong with. That is so true with the guys here in the Bible. It shows you that in life God is going to put people in your life that are going to sharpen you, but do not get to the point where you think that they are without sin. It is by the grace of God that God saved them, gave them what they needed, and got them to a point, but they are going to have bad days. They are going to react instead of respond. They are going to struggle with things in life. That does not mean you cannot learn from them. Sometimes we get so negative that we, as the old expression goes, we throw the baby out with the bathwater. We just lose sight of all the good that somebody has because we just want to focus on that negative part.

I told you, Noah has been a great example for me in the Bible, and you want to learn how to overcome the world, boy, he is the guy. But I will tell you what, if I wanted to preach on his negativity, he got drunk. Moses was a great man in the service of God, but he was a murderer, killed an Egyptian and hid him in the sand. Abraham is one of the greatest examples anywhere in the Bible for the time you get saved, you get to that spiritual material in your life, but he loses faith in God a number of times. Samuel was a great study for the ministry, but he lost faith with God and could not follow what God was saying. David is a man after God's own heart, but he was a murderer and an adulterer. The bottom line is, Job was a great, overcame the devil, but he was self-righteous. Daniel overcame the flesh, but he allowed a king to bow down before him instead of God and took the glory, and God put him in the lions' den. Everybody's feet is made of clay. Now your choice is you are going to focus on the negative part and get nothing from it, or you are going to let God use the good stuff in iron sharpened with iron. We are going to be for each other, or we are going to be against each other. It is just that simple. It is just that simple.

Everybody is perfect. No church, no structure will be perfect. Many times we get into the wrong relationships or get saved and cannot separate ourselves from them that will hurt us spiritually. Two great truths throughout the Bible that are so true based on your association with people of either allowing people in your life to make you better or people in your life that are going to be negative and make you worse.

- When you run with the wolves, you will learn to howl at the moon. It is just that simple. You run with a worldly crowd, you will be out there with them.
- Birds of a feather flock together. People who have the same associations will always link up together.

It is true. It is true of everything in life. That is why you have Jeep clubs. That is why you have truck clubs, golf clubs. I was over picking up some stuff for camp the other day, and I would drive my little Ford Ranger, and I pulled into the surplus store. I was going to get some backpacks or something. There was a garage right there, and a guy came running over, and he

says, "You need to join our Ranger club." Everybody has got to, you know why? Because it is true. Birds of a feather flock together. People who have an association want to hang out together.

In life, men will learn nothing apart from what he has learned about life from who he has associated with. If he associates with God's people in the Word of God, then he will learn it right. If he associates with the things of the world or God's people who are not doing what is right, then that is where he is. The Laodicean Church period, we know it very well. The Church of Jesus Christ today laying in shambles. A whole body of believers who follow the wrong man, who dump the Bible and dump truth. Now Revelation 3:17-18 says that it is wretched, poor, blind, and miserable, and naked, and had brought in a worldly system to the Lord's people and brought them to a dark place in their life where there is nothing positive anymore.

VII. The Church as God's Battle Axe

You build a church by building people. You have heard me say it many, many times, you build people one at a time. You build people one at a time by simply following the concept of Proverbs 27:17, iron sharpening iron, making somebody better, sharpening them to a cutting edge for God in all the things that they do to make them better.

In the Old Testament, there is a story back there that everybody thinks is a very confusing story. I have had people scratch their head and ask me this question over and over because it looks so bizarre in the Bible. But the standard line is when something in the Bible really looks bizarre, that probably means in most cases, it is a great truth once you figure it out. It is a story. You probably will know the story. It is a story back there in 2 Kings 6. It is one of those weird stories where a guy is cutting down a tree with an axe, and the axe head comes off, falls into the water. Then a guy says, "Alas, man, I was cutting a tree down, lost my axe head, now I cannot cut the tree down anymore." And Elijah shows up. Elijah does a great miracle. The Bible says that the iron axe head actually swims over to the guy, picks it up, puts it back on, goes back to work. Guys look at that, I have held my life. People are saying, "Well, I do not get that. Man, what is this all about?"

Let me tell you. First of all, doctrinally, we are dealing with the nation of Israel. Jeremiah 46:22 and Jeremiah 51:20 says that the nation of Israel is God's battle axe. In Matthew 3:10, that axe was to cut out and root out the things in the world. It is an illustration and a picture here of Israel as God's axe to cut down the trees, the nations. You will want to see this in Jeremiah 1:1-4. But Israel has lost its cutting edge. It can no longer do the job that God entailed it to be of being God's battle axe because it has lost its edge. It is worthless now. So Elijah shows up, the man of God, and brings the axe head back, a picture of the restoration of the nation of Israel. He goes back to work cutting down the trees, which represent the axe, represent the nation of Israel.

Inspirationally, it is a picture of you and me. When we lose our cutting edge, when we cease to be what God wants us to be and we lose that cutting edge to be able to cut down the way that God wants us to go through the wrong associations and the wrong things that we do, the wrong attitude, the cynical spirit, the negative about everything and everybody. When we get into that mode and God, it ceases to, we cease to be that sharp cutting edge that really gets the job done

with God. The Bible is likened to a sharp two-edged sword. It cuts two ways. Sometimes you have to go in and use it as a battle sword, and you just hack people to pieces because that is what it requires. Other times, you have to use it as a fine scalpel because the problem is so right there that you have got to be very careful how you deal with it. The key is learning how to use it. But at the end of the day, like Israel, you and I are God's battle axes. We are to tear up this world and cut it to pieces for the honor and glory of God. Most of God's people are like that axe head. They have lost their cutting edge by association.

Our verse says, "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." The job of any church, the job of any pastor, is to make you better. I could focus on the negativity in people's lives. Who could? That does not solve any problems. That does not fix anything. That does not help somebody get better. The key to you getting and being everything God wants you to be is somebody looking at you and focusing on you that is good at helping you get better. You know as well as I do, how many kids we have dealt with over the years and probably have some at camp that all their life, their parents told them how worthless they were. Their parents abused them verbally, maybe physically. They told them how dumb they were, how stupid they were, how lazy they were, told everything about them. You know what it produces? It produces the kids who actually come in like believing that. Now Christianity should be different. When you get saved, you are a new creature in Christ Jesus. This church at least follows what the Bible says, realizing that you are a new creature, and I am not going to waste a lot of time on the old creature, I want to help the new creature get better every day. Because that is the only way it works to make you better.

The key word there is countenance. You remember back in Genesis 4:5-6, we had the story of Cain. It is the first time the word countenance really shows up in the Bible. The Bible says that the Lord came to Cain and he says, "Why hast thou countenance fallen?" Your countenance is what is on the inside showing up on your face on the outside. Some people hide it well, some people do not. Some people you can look across the room and say he has got a problem. Some people can hide it very well, and that is a good thing I think. But your countenance is based on your spirit. Your spirit is based on who you have associated with. You build your life. I build this work on positive things that God is doing. You can find in any church the negative things because there is no perfect church. No perfect pastor. There are no perfect people. We have a choice to make. We can either look at each other and realize that all we have is us outside the Word of God in this church. The person sitting next to you, the person that you are sitting with today, or the person in front of you or behind you, there may come a time in your life when that is all that you have. Right now we need to come to the place that we understand this great concept.

People in life and the work of God, negative people. God, you know what, you cannot use them. You cannot do anything with them because you do not want that negativity to infest in everything you have got. So you know what, you put them on a shelf with a label, "Do not open until the judgment seat of Christ."

VIII. Practical Application: Camp and Softball

We had a camp meeting last night, for all the people going, man, we got a great bunch of all the workers. Not last night, it was Friday night. I told them, I said camp is one of the hardest things that you have to do because you are dealing as a counselor with kids who are just young kids, and they can stay up all night and you cannot. They will push it to the limits. It is a thing where you just cannot wear you out. You will get tired, it is going to be hot. I just saw the weather today, the index for camp, it decked probably over one hundred degrees. Thank God. In the old days in camp, we stayed in cabins with no air conditioning. A lot of recluse spiders but no air conditioning. It was terrible and bearable. I just tell you, so we got that going for it. But it is going to be a long hot day, and you are going to get tired, and the kids are going to push them. I am telling you right now our attitude about sharpening those kids that week, we will never get that same group ever again in the same spot for the same time. Meaning we have got one shot at them. There will be plenty of kids there that probably are not saved. There will be a lot of kids there that are saved but just need that sharpening process. It is what we have to do. Making a difference in kids' lives based on our positive attitude. It is just the way it is.

In life in general, people, unsaved people will be drawn to things that are positive. They will be drawn to positive people because they live in a world of negativity. People, even God's people out of fellowship, they live in a world where there is nothing positive. Even the things that they want to pretend are positive wind up being negative at the end of the day. The freshness of a New Testament Christianity of somebody actually having goals and something in their lives that are absolutely fundamental, they will be drawn to that.

The greatest example of that is you girls in playing softball with Bill, your umpire. He loves you guys. He has told me over and over again, "You are the greatest people in the world." He tried to give me the credit for it as the pastor. I just said, "Bill, this is who they are." But he sees you out there. These guys umpire all the city games. They do, and they get cussed at, they get thrown stuff at them. He loves, all those guys love coming to us because we do not give him any problems. But you girls have made a difference in his life. He is unsaved. He watches you. He enjoys being there. He watches you guys out there, and he is laughing about it. He is an umpire. He is supposed to stay out of it. He is supposed to be neutral. But he will help you guys. It is okay. I am a neutral pitcher. I help you guys. If I walk one on this team, then I will walk one the next time. Everything is fair. But he loves you guys because he watches you. I watch you. You are out there, and somebody is running to second base, and somebody throws the ball, and you get them out. The person that just got them out hugs the person and apologizes for getting them out. It is called ball games. They are hugging each other. That is what he sees that. He sees it. He sees it as a fun time. Yeah, there is competition. But the competition does not override iron sharpening iron.

I can control my pitches pretty good. I see those young girls coming up there that never got to hit a ball. I will give them the biggest goose egg they ever saw in their life. If the softball does not work, next week I will show up with a volleyball. If the volleyball does not work, I will bring a basketball the next week. They are going to hit the ball. From my position, when you have somebody come up who has never played ball in their life and they come out to play. You know why they come out to play? Because you guys want to make them better. You invited them to

come out. You encouraged them. They struck out, and you applaud. They miss the ball, and you cheer them on. When they hit the ball, fireworks go off. But that is what you do. You take people who fundamentally, and you make them better. Because that is what our job is. It is what we do.

I am telling you, one of the greatest assets of this church that illustrates this great principle is our prayer groups, which we are going to kick over next week, and we will start every twelve weeks. We develop them and get new people in them and change teams. That is the ultimate fulfillment in my mind of Iron Sharpening Iron. You ladies and you guys taking people and making them better. Spending quality time with them, giving them what they need. People taking the Word of God and through their time bonding together, making everybody better. One of the greatest things that we ever did. This is why our church, and I know it is not perfect and it has got its issues. I guarantee you it does. But this is why this church is filled with quality people and keeps turning them out. People who care about other people. You build them like I built you. You followed a man who followed a book, and you learned by example from the Bible and in samples from the people that we have had here, and you have come with a great truth that all we have is two things. All we have is the Bible, and all we have is each other. If we do not take care of each other, we are in trouble.

IX. Training Our Hearts and Flying Tight Formations

I have been in the ministry almost fifty years. Listen to me on this. Here is the key. With almost fifty years of ministry, my ears have heard plenty of negative things. My tenure in pastoring and working with people, these old ears have heard, it is the reason why I am going deaf, they just do not want to hear it anymore. My ears have heard plenty of negative things. But I want to tell you something. This is what you need to do. I train my heart never to listen. You have got to come to the place that you are going to hear it. You have to train your heart not to listen to it. It is the key to a successful life. It is the key to a successful ministry. The ministry is not hard. It is just a lot of hard work. One man, a pastor, can only do so much. But when you train, over time, sixty, seventy, eighty people who do with people what needs to be done, that is how you build it through the principles of the Word of God. Building in them responsibility and accountability. Building in them, as I gave you the other night, adaptability, compatibility, durability, and flexibility. That is a ministry built on Proverbs 27:17. Iron sharpened with iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

In the church age now, we are to be separate from the world. In the Bible, that is called sanctification. Nobody knows that much anymore. 2 Corinthians 6 is the definitive chapter on it, if you want to look it up. Even though we are in this world, we are no longer of this world. To survive and to be all that God wants us to be, we need only have three things to make us complete.

- We need to have the Word of God because that will be the power of God in your life.
- We need to have the New Testament local church because that will be the structure of God in your life.
- We need each other.

Now the first two will make you better. After you get the first two down, then you can make other people better with what you know and what you have learned. Then together, we fulfill our mission that God has given for us.

Last Sunday after Jeff preached, I just made a quick reference to the air show because the Blue Angels were down there. I told you the story how that the Blue Angels, they have had some disasters over the years. They have been together since 1947, right after World War II. There were times where the two guys that do the crossover, they crashed and got killed. There were times that they just had engine failures, and they had to eject, and maybe they were okay, lost the plane. But it was one case where when they had that four plane diamond formation that all four planes just nosed into the ground. I told you that they are trained to watch the leader. In a worldly sense, it is a sad thing because too many times in the world we follow the leader, and it winds up being a disaster. For us, we need to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit of God, and you will never go into the ground.

But I thought this week as I was thinking about this, what I wanted to say today, of another great example. I try to learn from everything. During World War II, America, most people, they see all the D-Day stuff in the movies about D-Day, and they think that that is all there was to it. D-Day did not happen until 1944. We were in the war in 1941. There was four years there that we struggled. A couple of times we came close to losing the war. But we did not start storming the shore in Normandy. We started in Africa actually. So once we defeated Rommel in Africa, then we moved over to Sicily. Once we got a foothold in Sicily, then we come into Italy, and we moved our way up to Italy, and then on June the 6th, 1944, then they come ashore in France, and they had two ways to do it. But we were not fighting on European shores until June 6th, 1944. The war was over in 1945. So we were not there very long.

The way they carried the war to Germany and all the occupied countries was through the 8th Air Force and daylight bombing. They would strike the industrial heart of Germany, France, where they made ball bearings like a Schweinfurt or other places, the torpedo factory, where they made torpedoes for the U-boats that were just taking a heavy toll in the Atlantic. But it did not come without a great price. The German Luftwaffe was probably the greatest air force in the world. They had been fighting war since 1934 in Spain. We had B-17 bombers that had ten men in them, and they would send out just a number. They would send out a thousand plane raid, and the Germans would shoot down fifty planes, five hundred men dead in one day. Terrible losses.

Somebody came up with a brilliant idea of putting all these B-17s in what they called a box formation, that they flew almost wingtip to wingtip. Now each B-17, here is the theory behind it, and it is brilliant. Each B-17 has ten .50 caliber machine guns. Each machine gun can fire around five hundred rounds a minute. So we are looking potentially if you have a thousand planes or five hundred planes, three, six million bullets coming at you all at once. That is a lot of firepower coming your way. The idea was that when you kept, because when they were flying loose, the Luftwaffe would get down in between them and shoot, and once they knocked two or three down, there was a gap, and they just tore them to pieces. So the idea was to fly the tightest formations that they could, not allowing the Germans to penetrate into their formation, that they had to stay on the outer perimeter. On the outer perimeter, if a guy was crazy enough to come in

with his gun blazing, he had two million bullets coming his way. There were times when they flew tight formations that he did not lose anybody. Flak was a problem where they fired it up from the ground, and you may have a B-17 that got an engine hit, and he had to lag behind because they could not keep up and they could not stay with him, and he got picked off. But as far as the fighters coming in and doing the damage, it fixed that problem.

I want you to know that the key to it all was not the machine guns that they had and the firepower. The key to what they had, their success, was the tight formations that they flew. Now, Ephesians 4:4-5 says that we are one body. We are one spirit. We have one Lord. We have one faith. We have one baptism. Christianity is to be a oneness. It is to be a unity. We have a weapon that cannot fire three million .50 caliber slugs out a minute, but we have a book that can fire out ten million principles a second. But just as those bombers, the Bible and the principles that we have will mean nothing if we as a church do not fly tight formations, if we do not stay together, if we do not keep the enemy from penetrating down in the middle of what we are trying to do, that we keep them on the outside, the perimeter, but they never get on the inside. The Bible will mean nothing if we do not fly that tight formation and let nothing between us and use the principles that when they come in with guns blazing, knock them right out of the sky. That will only happen when and if iron sharpeneth iron. You take the people that God brings into us, and we make them better.

Next week at camp, we look at those kids as the future, not only this church, but wherever God is going to take them. We have one goal, and that is maybe they do not all get saved, maybe they do not all get right with God. But you know what? The impact that you are going to have in their life for that week will carry on for the rest of their lives. Maybe God is not ready for them to get it together right then, but it will be what He uses down the line someplace. We have to let them go better than we find them. We have to let them go with the positive experience that for one week they were with people that loved them, cared for them, genuinely wanted nothing from them, accepted them where they were, and had one goal. That is that we all together fly the tight formation of making them better.

X. Conclusion and Call to Action

It starts here with you. It starts with every one of you looking to the person to the left and the right and front and behind and realize that coming in life, that person may be the only person you have got in life. It may be all you have. Iron sharpeneth iron has to become our watchword of this church. It is one of the greatest verses anywhere in the Bible. I try to keep it before you in everything that we do, focusing on being positive people and not negative. Every day of our lives helping others, not hurting them, making them better, keeping each other sharp, allowing the church to be God's battle axe to do the work that it needs to do. Taking the truth of God's word to people and through us allowing the word of God to cut out their lives what needs to go. Then us taking them and as iron sharpened with iron making them better.

We can always have people in every case, most of us included, that have problems in our lives. We can either choose to focus on those problems or we can help them get better and get past those problems. But it comes with you and me keeping them sharp, keeping ourselves sharp.

That iron sharpening iron, making them better and getting them to the place where they can become a fine cutting instrument in the hand of God.

Something to think about. We have been here now for a long time. Let me ask you a question, and I do not want an answer. Who are you sharpening today with your life? Oh, I know now there is going to be a sellout at the bookstore for files and sharpening tools. That is great. Praise the Lord. Maybe it makes the difference and you go from here. But I am asking you right now, who are you sharpening? Who are you sharpening? Who are you taking in your life? You say, "Well, you have not given me anybody." It is not about me giving you anybody. It is about you seeing people around you that you know are struggling. Why are not you there? See, it is our job.

I came in this morning at the bottom of the steps down there. Sam was standing there crying, weeping. He has got terminal cancer. Comes to church every Sunday. He does not miss a Bible study. We are out on restart and the hot heat, he is out there too. This church is all he has got. He went to the experimental KU for the cancer treatment, and it has given him a little boost in the thing. But he suffers every day. I lost a dad to cancer. I know the pain that they go through. Yet it never slows him up. Here he is standing down here coming to church overwhelmed that he is feeling probably that someday he will not be here anymore for all this. Yet all I had to do was just put my arm around and walk him over to two guys that were sitting on the thing there and say, "Hey, he is having a tough time." They took care of him. Iron sharpeneth iron. They are all around us, folks. All you have to do is open your eyes and look. There are all kinds of needs. There are all kinds of issues. There is always somebody right around the corner that you can invest your life in to make better.

As I said, in life you will hear many negative things. We need to train our hearts simply not to listen and focus on that great principle that we are all we have got. If we do not hang together, we will certainly hang separately. We are all we have got. God has given us the book. God has given us wonderful people. God has given us a good church with a strong structure. I know it is not perfect. But in the choices in life we are going to focus on what is negative or focus on what is positive and look around you. Look at the person sitting in front of you, behind you, and looking for that person who just needs.

I told the people back in Canton at the Methodist Church, I said, "Sometimes it is not enough just to go the extra mile. Sometimes you have got to go the extra mile. You have got to be there for them." My whole ministry has been about being there for you when you could not be there for yourself. We need to be there for each other because there will be times when we cannot be there for ourselves. But that is what makes us strong. That is what makes it really good. That is where the blessings are. That is why this verse is such a great verse. "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." It starts right here and goes into camp next week. By the grace of God, it does not end when camp is gone. It just keeps on moving. Maybe I ought to preach this message every six months. But it is where we are at.

We will hold up there. I need my guys back there, and we will go up and get that food brought in. If you want to sponsor somebody, you can see me. If you have got concession stand money for your kids, you can do it. Remember, counselors do not pay for concession stand. We have got a

busy week ahead of us. Let us pray for each other. Let us help each other. Let us make each other better. Again, meet our visitors. I know some of them had to leave because they had an event they had to get to. But the ones that are still here, make them feel welcome. Let us have a word of prayer, and we will be dismissed. Father, we do thank you and praise you for the Lord Jesus. We love you so.