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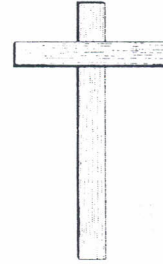
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As Iron Sharpens Iron: A Journey of Friendship and Faith



by Rick Krug, Scott Lambert,
Jon K. Reed, and Andrew B. Wall

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. (Prov 27:17 NIV)

Introduction

In 1991, four Christian brothers who had become friends during their college years decided to get together on a regular basis for the purpose of mutual spiritual encouragement. Since then, our group of four has gathered almost monthly to share a day of encouragement and fellowship, accountability and confession, prayer, and play. Since our families are scattered all over Southern California (and now Flagstaff, Arizona), getting the four of us together on the same date has been a logistical challenge. However, our regular time together has been well worth our efforts.

In this article, we will share the benefits and blessings we have experienced in spending intentional quality time together as Christian brothers. We specifically want to invite and challenge Christian men to

consider their need for such a group in their own lives.¹ While we each happen to be full-time ministers in local churches, we heartily believe that every Christian man, regardless of his profession, would benefit from a small group experience of encouragement and accountability.

Regular Accountability

One of our biggest blessings has been the accountability we've shared. As our trust has grown, we have invited each other to lovingly "hold our feet to the fire" in key areas of our lives. Each month, we ask each other specific questions on a number of mutually agreed-upon subjects:

- How would your wife say your marriage is really going?
- Are you spending quality time with your children?
- Are you maintaining sexual purity, in thought and in deed?
- What challenges are you facing in your ministry?

- How is your walk with God?
How is your prayer life?

Knowing that we will have to answer these questions honestly when we get together has often provoked and empowered us to more Christlike behavior. By the grace of God, we have helped each other overcome sin through this process. These accountability questions challenge us to keep growing in a number of areas. When we get together we always talk and pray about our personal relationships with the Lord. Even though Christianity is our "life," sometimes we feel far from God. We check to see if we have been spending quality time in prayer and how we have been growing in our faith. Another central area of our accountability regards our wives and children. Many modern careers, including full-time ministry, can deplete a person's time with his family. We try desperately to make sure that that isn't happening. Our wives have been very supportive of

our getting together, despite our time away from them, because they have come to see the value of the time that we share.

Power of Confession

Second, we have experienced the cathartic power of honesty and confession. Over time, we have been able to share our “secret” sins and confess to God and each other the areas in our lives in which we are struggling. We cannot express how important it has been in our personal walks with God to have brothers with whom we can be completely open. In our sharing, we are reminded regularly about our own humanness. We do not have to fight Satan alone.

Ministry Enrichment

Third, this group has been extremely important in shaping our ministries. As we reflect on each other’s ministries and challenge one another, our ministries in our local congregations are blessed. Listening to each other’s ministry ideas and struggles allows us to evaluate our own situations. We continually encourage one another to be the ministers that God has called us to be by sharing helpful books, seminars, classes, journals, and ideas with each other. Spending time in prayer, specifically for the churches with which we are working, has been very rewarding.

A Safe Place

A fourth benefit, of special relevance to full-time ministers, is that the group serves as a major ministry “outlet.” Being ministers,

we experience the challenge of being continually in the public spotlight. Whenever we are with people, we are expected to be in our ministerial role. If we wake up on the wrong side of the bed, we cannot afford to lash out in anger, though we often feel like doing so. One negative conversation with an immature Christian can wipe out years of relationship building. Further, there is only so much we can comfortably share with our fellow church members, no matter how close we get to them. The false perception that ministers are supposed to be above sin has caused many ministers to be quiet about their darkest struggles. Our guard is always up.

However, when we get together as a group, we sense a tremendous relief in completely letting down. We can be ourselves: slip up, say stupid things, smoke cigars, cry, laugh, “veg” out, be politically incorrect, have bad breath—and not worry about it. Having this outlet has been an oasis for us. Our group serves as a safe place where we can talk about innovative ideas, ministry problems, people frustrations, personal difficulties, and family struggles without the fear of getting fired or causing a major uproar in our congregations. For us as ministers, this experience is renewing and energizing.

Conclusion

During our time together, we have come to believe that God has brought us together for a reason. We each have very different personality types. We differ significantly in our political views and in many areas of

biblical interpretation. We fall at different locations on the conservative/progressive spectrum. With such diversity, God has stretched us in our faith and taught us of his grace. Yet out of our diverse group, God has forged strong bonds of friendship and brotherly love. Ultimately, our differences do not matter nearly so much as what we do share—a passionate faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and a commitment to ministry within his body. Without the encouragement, accountability, and fellowship God has provided for us in this group, the road of ministry would be a much more difficult and lonely place. We believe that all Christian men, and particularly ministers, would benefit from such a group just as a dull blade benefits from a whetstone.

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Notes

¹Generally speaking, it is our observation that women are quite proficient at developing significant relationships with other women, while men often lack substantive relationships with other men. Men are beginning to see the need for better friendships with other men. Promise Keepers, a rapidly growing parachurch organization, challenges Christian men to hold each other up in faith, families, moral and ethical purity, work, and church through the formation of small groups of prayer, support, and accountability.