

## CORPORATE BIBLE STUDY NOURISHES THE HEART Proverbs 27:17

### INTRODUCTION:

One of the blockbuster movies of 2010, released in May of this year, was *Iron Man 2*, a sequel to the 2008 hit *Iron Man*. The *Iron Man* movies are based on a Marvel Comic character of the same name.

The “Iron Man” is Tony Stark, a wealthy industrialist who is forced to wear an armored suit after a life-threatening accident. His armored suit is like the exoskeleton of some insects and it provides a measure of protection for his weakened body. Unwilling to merely enjoy being protected in his iron suit, Stark uses that armor to fortify him as he wages a fight against evil.

In Proverbs 27:17, Solomon writes about a different kind of iron men. These iron men sharpen themselves and hone their edge by their choice to associate with other people. In the process, they become sharper, finer and more capable than they otherwise might have been – and thus more fit to wage the fight against evil. Hear these words of Solomon:

<sup>17</sup> *As iron sharpens iron,  
so one man sharpens another.*

That’s it. One sentence. But what an image it creates.

I’ve seen people use iron files to sharpen lawnmower blades, chainsaw teeth, scissors, knives and a lot of other edges that had become dull. I understand this metaphor. And you do, too.

So we have read the passage. And we can visualize the picture. All that’s left is to apply the principle. So let’s.

One of the first observations that I want to make is that if it is true that, “*as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another*”, that means that **other people have a profound and lasting impact on us**. Therefore, we ought to choose our companions wisely. While some will sharpen us, we all realize that some will not – in fact, their company will cost us our edge and dull our effectiveness.

- Proverbs 13:20 is instructive. There, Solomon wrote:  
<sup>20</sup> *He who walks with the wise grows wise,  
but a companion of fools suffers harm.*
- Proverbs 12:26 teaches us,  
<sup>26</sup> *A righteous man is cautious in friendship,  
but the way of the wicked leads them astray.*

Or, as the New King James translation has phrased it:

<sup>26</sup> *The righteous should choose his friends carefully,  
For the way of the wicked leads them astray.*

- Proverbs 14:7 observes:

<sup>7</sup> *Stay away from a foolish man,  
for you will not find knowledge on his lips.*

- Or, as the apostle Paul put it in the New Testament letter of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, in chapter 15 and in verse 33:

<sup>33</sup> *Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."*

Do you get the message? Your friends are going to influence you significantly so choose them wisely.

- If you want to be influenced to be rich in material goods, hang out with rich people and they will encourage you to accumulate material assets.
- If you want to be encouraged to be an outdoorsman, spend time with people who enjoy the great outdoors.
- If you want to develop a hobby or a craft, associate with those who pursue that hobby or craft.
- If you want to become patient, long-suffering and a little embarrassed, socialize with Cub fans.

Now, think of this: if you want to grow in your knowledge of God's Word and in your obedience to God's Word, with whom should you spend your time? Would it not be with those who are studying God's Word and learning to apply it to their lives? It just makes sense to me.

*"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."* If you want to get good at knowing and doing the will of God, you ought to be attending corporate Bible study.

We have taken a summer break from our Wednesday evening Bible studies but we will start up again the first week of September and I want you to join us. These are not like Sunday morning worship services. We don't have a song service. We don't receive an offering. And I don't preach a sermon.

Instead, we have an informal time of teaching with opportunity to ask questions and make comments as we go along. I will admit that sometimes I get the bit between my teeth and start preachifying a little but it is never a prepared sermon...it is just me getting a little carried away. We meet in the New Life Center around tables. There is fresh coffee and great fellowship. And some iron gets sharpened every week.

When we start up again the first of September, we are going to use a reality television theme. We aren't going to watch the shows. And we

probably won't even talk about them very much. But the titles of some popular reality TV shows will be the titles for a unit of studies. I haven't firmed up the lessons yet but I'm thinking about such studies as:

1. America's Got Talent – The parable of the talents
2. Biggest Loser – Rich Young Ruler
3. Celebrity Apprentice – Moses
4. Little People, Big World – Zacchaeus
5. Top Chef – Jacob and Esau
6. Hoarders – Farmer who built the bigger barn

And if you've got some ideas, I'd like to hear them. I think we can have a good time and learn a lot by using so-called reality TV as a starting point for some informal Bible studies.

And I really want you to join us...not just because it looks good to have a crowd and it is easier to have a spirited discussion with a full house...I want you to join us because there are some real benefits you will derive from being a part of a corporate/group Bible study.

#### I. **Greater Accountability**

One of those advantages is greater accountability. We try to keep track of our congregation on a Sunday morning and I think we do a pretty good job. We circulate the red attendance pads and you folk are terrific about filling those out each week.

The first thing Sandy does when she gets to the office each week is to enter that information into a spreadsheet she has created so she can keep track of our people. A report is then printed and given to the elders and to me so we can try to provide appropriate shepherding to the congregation. But for all of that, it is still possible for someone to miss church for a few weeks before we notice that their attendance pattern has changed.

But if someone is involved in a small-group Bible Study, their presence and absence is more obvious.

It reminds me of an incident that is recorded in I Samuel 20. King Saul had become angry with David and wanted to kill him. David told Saul's son, Jonathan, what his father was planning but Jonathan couldn't believe it. So David said, "Here's what I'll do. I am supposed to eat at the King's table tomorrow but I'm not going. I'll hide in the field. If your dad asks where I've gone, tell him I went to Bethlehem. If you dad says that's alright as long as I am well, then we will know he has no evil intent against me. But if he blows his top, we'll both know he's angry and out to kill me."

I Samuel 20:18 records Jonathan's response to David's proposal:

<sup>18</sup> Then Jonathan said to David: "Tomorrow is the New Moon festival. You will be missed, because your seat will be empty."

That's the way it is with a small group or corporate Bible study. If you miss, you will be missed. We are held to a greater accountability in that kind of a setting. And if your goal is to be honed and sharpened and made more effective for the work of the Lord, you will welcome that accountability.

## II. **Greater Fellowship**

Another advantage of corporate Bible study is greater fellowship. As you might imagine, I enjoy spending time with people who like old tractors. Some of you who like going to auctions and flea markets, have a bond with other people who are treasure-hunters like that. Many young mothers benefit from the companionship they experience in a mothers' group. Grief-support groups, Alcoholics Anonymous, Weight Watchers and scores of other organizations are taking advantage of the dynamic of fellowship when people with a shared interest get together to encourage one another.

That is precisely what happens when believers get together to study the Bible together. Not only do they increase in their knowledge of God's Word, they also increase in their closeness, their companionship and their bond with one another.

That's the way it is supposed to be and that is the way it has always been. The church began on the Day of Pentecost seven weeks after Jesus died and rose again. The birth of the church is recorded in Acts chapter 2, verse 38. Just 4 verses later, Acts 2:42, tells us of these very first Christians:

<sup>42</sup> *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

They were devoted to learning what the apostles were teaching. The apostles were instructing these new Christians about Jesus and where he fits in God's overarching work among men. These early Christians were not casual adherents to some organization and they were not just fans of Jesus. They were devoted to learning about him.

The very next thing that Luke observed about these first believers is that they were also devoted to the fellowship. Their relationships with one another mattered to them. They were as committed to one another as they were to the Lord.

The Bible describes the church as an army: we have to look out for one another. The Bible describes the church as a body: we are connected to one another.

Within the church, relationships matter...and corporate Bible Study helps us to nurture those relationships because it affords greater fellowship.

### III. Greater Understanding

Corporate Bible study provides us with greater understanding because we are not being taught by one person. Everyone has a chance to weigh-in and share insights, opinions and perspectives. We learn from one another in the give-and-take of a group Bible study.

I liken it to the person who gets all of his news from only one network or only one station or only one newspaper. If someone gets all of his news from only one source, that news is apt to be slanted.

And if all of your Biblical instruction comes from only one source, that instruction is apt to be slanted, too. I try to be objective. I try not to ride a few hobbyhorses and beat a few dead horses. I try to give balanced teaching from the Old Testament and the New. I try to draw illustrations from a wide variety of sources. But try as I might, I still tend to see things the way I see things.

In the informal setting of a small group or corporate Bible study, people ask questions that I've never thought about and my perspective broadens. They share insights that I've never considered and my mind becomes more open. They give illustrations that I'd never heard and my spirit is illuminated. In that way, just as iron sharpens iron, so when a group of people study the Bible together, they all benefit.

### CONCLUSION:

For iron to be able to sharpen iron, the two "irons" must come together. A file won't sharpen an ax if the file is in the house and the ax is in the barn. Similarly, the finest Christians in the world will not hone your faith, sharpen your mind and improve your edge if you are not in contact with them. We provide you with that opportunity in our corporate Bible study times at 9:00 a.m. on Sunday mornings, at 7:00 p.m. on Sunday evenings and, starting again in September, at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday evenings. But these studies only benefit the people who attend them.

Steven Covey, in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, tells of an eager woodcutter who landed a job cutting trees. On his first day, he cut down 18 trees and his boss was impressed. On the second day, he cut down 15 trees. And by the third day, he could only fell 10 trees. He returned his boss' ax to him along with his resignation. He said he could not understand why his production had fallen so. "When was the last time you sharpened my ax?" asked the boss. "Sharpen your ax? I didn't have time to sharpen your ax," said the woodcutter. "I was too busy cutting down trees."

07/25/10

It is possible for us to get so involved in life and even in ministry that we fail to sharpen ourselves by studying with others. Don't let it happen to you.

**INVITATION:** #410 – *“Standing On The Promises”*