

Synergy

You don't expect to see a lovebird standing 6'3" tall with rippling muscles on every bone of his body and weighing 215 pounds donate vital body parts to his wife, but this love story isn't ordinary in any sense of the word.

My big brother, Bob, was always my hero in my growing up years. His athletic prowess is only surpassed by his love for the first and only love of his lifetime, his bride Mary Evelyn.

For thirty years he cherished her, provided bountifully for her, lavished her with gifts and vacations to exotic places. Then, in the apex of their life together, her days were seemingly coming quickly and tragically to a close. Her kidneys ceased their vital function due to a congenital disorder through her family line. No matching donor could be located. A cytogenic match was essential and non-available. In heroic desperation brother Bob offered his own kidney as a possible match. The doctors scoffed at his initial plea, citing the near impossibility of a husband/wife match. But when the big strapping dentist persisted, the tests for compatibility were granted. To everyone's surprise, as if the miracle was made in heaven, his kidney was a perfect match.

Quickly, the two lovebirds were rushed into surgery. Mary Evelyn's blood was now saturated with dangerous poison.

The doctors cut my brother from his navel to his backbone, removing three ribs and the life-saving organ. (It only took Adam one rib to give life to Eve. Irony! It cost Bob three!) Swiftly, his kidney was placed into the abdomen of his bride. The vessels and tubes were skillfully joined. The next morning, her blood was being filtered perfectly through it. She will probably outlive him!

I know my brother Bob! If she would have needed both of his kidneys, he would gladly have given them. He would have given her his heart if she had needed it, too!

Great friendships aren't limited to the exchange of wedding bands. Though rare and invaluable, the literal survival of a Godly man depends on his willingness to "give a kidney" and care deeply for at least one really good friend.

A **real** friend will give you insight that will save you from a disastrous business, family or moral decision. "Wisdom is found in the counsel of many." (Proverbs 11:14)

A **real** friend will lovingly but unashamedly "risk a kidney" and point out a blind spot or chisel off a rough edge that's holding you back from being all God intends for you to be. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." (Proverbs 27:6)

A **real** friend will hold you accountable to the high calling of Christ-likeness that you're embarking upon.

A **real** friend is willing to ask you tough questions and willing to wait until he gets a straight answer.

Real friends bring synergy. Real friends bring reality to the equation, $1 \times 1 = 3$.

Many years ago at the Chicago World's Fair, a contest ensued to see how much weight a single mule could pull. One mule won by pulling a wagon with a load of 8,000 pounds. To the crowd's surprise two mules pulling in tandem could pull a wagon with four times that amount; a whopping 32,000 pounds!

Want a friendship like that? Want to embark on an iron-sharpening journey that will bring out your best, keep you from falling and push you to success in your spiritual quest to follow Christ? First commit yourself to loyalty. Next, commit yourself to stay in it no matter what the cost. Then commit yourself to regular weekly meetings and be willing to ask each other tough questions:

1. Have you intentionally read or seen anything this week that is sexually inappropriate?
2. Have you engaged in any impure activity this week?
3. Have you honored your wife (if applicable) this week?
4. Have you engaged in any inappropriate conversations or emotional or physical relationships?
5. Have you been in the Word and prayer every day this week?

We're in the arena and the gridiron is brutal. The enemy is in an all-out assault for your life and your soul. The stakes are high. As my football coach used to say, "Lace 'em tight and strap on your gear. We're going into that stadium tonight to win. We will fight and fight and fight until defeat is not an option."

Mark these Key Words:

friends

Old Testament Viewpoint

Proverbs 17:17; Proverbs 29:1; Proverbs 15:32; Proverbs 12:15; Proverbs 11:14; Proverbs 27:17

Proverbs 17:17 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Proverbs 29:1 A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.

Proverbs 15:32 He who neglects discipline despises himself, but he who listens to reproof acquires understanding.

Proverbs 12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel.

Proverbs 11:14 Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory.

Proverbs 27:17 Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

New Testament Viewpoint

Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:24-25; John 15:15; Philippians 2:25

Acts 2:42-47 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

John 15:15 No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.

Philippians 2:25 But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need.

OBSERVATION: What is God saying?

- 1) What qualities make a "true friendship" or a "Biblical friendship" distinct from a "worldly" or non-Christ honoring friendship?

- 2) God loves us just as we are, but He loves us too much to leave us like we are. How do "real friends" model that same kind of love with each other?

- 3) In what ways do your key friendships and alliances today differ from the Biblical model?

- 4) Paul gives Epaphroditus four distinctions as a real friend. What are they and what do you think each one means?
- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____
- 5) In what ways is it difficult for you to be held accountable? How big of a factor does pride play in your ability to be “sharpened” by a close friend?
- _____
- _____
- 6) Which of today’s verses speaks to you the loudest and clearest? Why?
- _____
- _____

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS: *What else of significance do you see God saying in this passage?*

APPLICATION: *How does this passage relate to me today? What changes does it bring to my life?*

LOCKER ROOM: *Scripture makes it clear that in Christ we are a new man (II Corin. 5:17). Scripture is also clear that the “old man” (the old sinful nature) is still trying to “wage war” with the “new man.” How is that “old man” fighting in you now and how can we help each other with that fight?*

MEMORY VERSE: Proverbs 27:17

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”

My Prayers

A

Adoration: Father, today I praise You for...

C

Confession: Father, please forgive me for...

T

Thanksgiving: Father, today I’m thankful for...

S

Supplication: Father, the people & things that I wish to pray for today are...