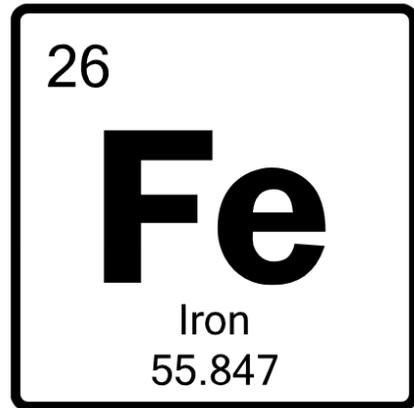
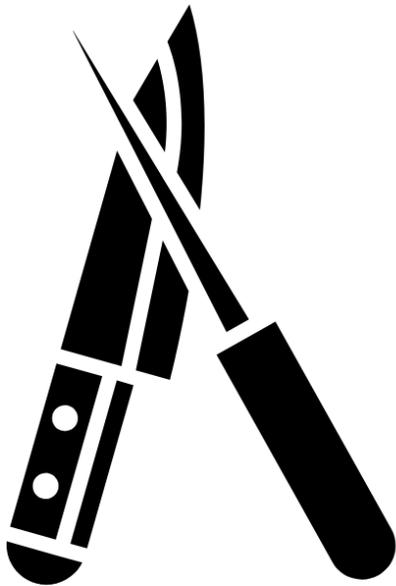


iron sharpens
iron



As iron sharpens iron,
so a man sharpens
the countenance of
his friend.

Proverbs 27:17

Iron Sharpens Iron

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Iron Sharpening Iron

“As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17). Iron was very important in ancient times, used for weapons and farming implements. Even today iron and steel can become dull and must be sharpened. In ancient times this was done by using another piece of iron to strike, grind or scrape the dull edge. Anything of lesser strength could not accomplish the sharpening.

“Sharpening is intentional, it doesn’t happen by accident. It involved friction, pressure, and sometimes sparks. The process is not always gentle, but it is productive. The result? Usefulness, readiness, and strength” (Rachel Cox).

The wise man uses this illustration to show our dependence on each other. It is important to remain sharp in our use for the Master. Proverbs 27:17 shows us to be friends, to be equals, and to be important to each other in continuing refinement for His use. It is important that we consider how to be effective in involving ourselves in the spiritual lives of our brethren to help each other get to heaven. This series of lessons are intended to help in this pursuit.

- **We are tools:** Romans 6:10-14, esp. 13; 1 Corinthians 12:14-25; 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- **We are weapons:** 2 Timothy 2:13-14 (Soldier); Ephesians 6:10-17, esp. 12,17; Romans 13:12; Hebrews 4:12; (cf. Isaiah 49:2)
- **Personal responsibility to remain sharp:** Hebrews 5:12-14; 2 Peter 1:5-11; 1 Corinthians 15:58; (Revelation 3:15-16, as a congregation)

Thought Questions:

1. Can I be fulfilling my obligations if I fail to remain sharp as an implement of God?
2. Can I be fulfilling my obligations to God if I am not involved in sharpening my brethren?
3. Who is my neighbor/friend/brother? (Luke 10:29-37)
4. Who is the most important member of any congregation? (cf. Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Corinthians 12:14-31)

To Do:

Knowing Your Brothers and Sisters

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). This passage is only one that speaks of the church as being a family. We should ask ourselves, what kind of family is this? How does it compare in importance to our physical families? Remember Jesus’ words as He spoke of His disciples (with his physical family standing by), *“Who is My mother and who are My brothers?”* And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, *‘Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.’*” (Matthew 12:48-50).

With the relationship that we enjoy as children of God, we have brothers and sisters to which we are obligated. We are not strangers. We are not mere acquaintances. While friends, that description fails to describe our full relationship as adopted children of God. As brothers and sisters in Christ, our love and devotion toward one another should mirror the physical families we often love so dearly.

- **God is our Father, and Jesus is His only begotten son:** Ephesians 1:1-14; Luke 6:36; Matthew 3:17; John 1:18; Romans 8:29; Hebrews 1:5-12
- **As Christians we are adopted children:** Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:4-7; Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 1:9-12
- **The Father has told us how we are to treat each other:** Romans 12:9-21; Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 5:15-21

Thought Questions:

1. Considering how our Heavenly Father has treated us, does it obligate us in our treatment of each other?
2. How does the makeup of our spiritual family (with God as Father, and Jesus as elder brother) compare to our physical families?
3. Consider the aspect of adoption, and how it applies to our relationship with God and our brothers and sisters.
4. God our Father does not show favoritism. Does our love for one another allow us to show favoritism in our treatment of our brothers and sisters?

To Do:

Accountability is Important

“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36). The idea of accountability permeates scripture. Because God is just, He will hold us accountable for the way we live our lives (2 Corinthians 5:9-11). The phrase *“they will give account”* (apodidōmi logos) used by Jesus indicates the need to render an explanation for your life. What we say and do (or fail to do) will have to be explained to the all-knowing Judge in that day. Obfuscation or excuses for our actions will not suffice. All will be known perfectly regarding how we have lived.

This gives us pause. Fortunately, God has given us directions to help each other in preparation for this day. We can help each other. The world calls this an “accountability partner.” It is important for us to ask for help as we seek to navigate our Christian duties. However, even if we fail in that task, the spiritually minded among us is instructed to assist. *“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted”* (Galatians 6:1).

- **A willingness to hold another accountable derives from love:** Romans 12:10; 1 Peter 2:17; James 5:19-20; Matthew 7:3-5; Luke 17:3-4
- **Each of us must be willing to be held accountable:** James 5:16; 1 Corinthians 12:26-27; 2 Corinthians 2:6-8; Hebrews 13:17
- **Ultimately, we will be held accountable by God Himself:** Romans 14:12; Hebrews 4:13; Jeremiah 17:9-10; Revelation 20:12

Thought Questions:

1. How can pride and shame hinder our efforts to hold each other accountable?
2. Is our approach to our brother important when we hold them accountable? (cf. Galatians 6:1)
3. What part does repentance play in our practicing accountability to one another?
4. Talk about what our obligations to one another look like (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:11).

To Do:

Shoring Up Weaknesses

“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus Christ came to this earth and navigated His Father’s will with perfection. Unfortunately, the same can not be said of us. Adam and Eve committed the first sins, and each of us have followed suit, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12).

James tells us that sin germinates from two things: Lust and enticement (1:14). Not all men are tempted by the same things. For example, Paul was not tempted to lust after a woman (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:7-9). However, we all have our weaknesses, and awareness of those weaknesses allows us to grow as well as seek help.

Though we may have different temptations, such temptations are common to men (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13); and arise from three sources. “For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 John 2:16).

- **Jesus Himself can help us with our weaknesses:** 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; 1 Peter 2:21; Jude 24-25; 1 Corinthians 11:1; (Holy Spirit, cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- **We can help one another with our weaknesses:** 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15; Hebrews 10:24-25; Proverbs 22:17-19; Hebrews 12:12-16
- **Weaknesses vary:** 1 John 2:15-17; Romans 12:17; Joshua 1:9; Proverbs 11:2; 16:28; 28:1; Proverbs 10:12; Ephesians 4:14; James 1:6, etc.

Thought Questions:

1. Discuss the difference between minding “*your own business*” (1 Thessalonians 4:11) and spiritual mindedness (Galatians 6:1-2).
2. Other than teaching, what other things can we do to shore up the weaknesses of our brother?
3. Would you benefit from an accountability partner in your life? How?
4. Which do you think is more typical: failures of commission or omission?

To Do:

The Warmth of Friendship

“Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (Proverbs 27:6). Even when young, we understand the significance and benefits of having a friend. Children are so good at making friends, but as we get older, it becomes more difficult. How wonderful it is to be able to go to a congregation and know that all there want to be your friend! We must remember however, *“A man who has friends must himself be friendly...”* (Proverbs 18:24).

Proverbs 27:6 indicates that a true friend sometimes can hurt our feelings. He does not do so out of spite but rather concern for our soul. As such his wounds are *“faithful,”* they support or nourish rather than tear down. Our proper response, though difficult, is to appreciate and love them for their efforts.

Faithful friends have a deep love for one another. A wonderful example of this love can be seen between Jonathan and David. Consider David’s lament when he heard of Jonathan’s death in battle, *“I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me; your love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women. How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!”* (2 Samuel 1:26-27).

- **Examples of great friends in the Bible:** 1 Samuel 18:1-4, 19:1-5; Ruth 1:16-18; Daniel 1:6-17; 2 Kings 2:1-14; 1 Corinthians 4:17; John 11:34-44; John 15:13-17
- **What friendship accomplishes:** Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; 1 Corinthians 15:33; John 15:12-14; Proverbs 18:24; Proverbs 27:9,17

Thought Questions:

1. Taking each passage concerning “great friends in the Bible” what is the most outstanding characteristic of each friendship?
2. Discuss what it means that in order to have friends, a man *“must himself be friendly”* (Proverbs 18:24)?
3. Who do we want to be our greatest friend? (cf. John 15:14)
4. Is the commonality we have as Christians sufficient to make us great friends (cf. Act 2:44-47)? If not, why not?

To Do:

Strengthening Each Other

“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29). The word edification, used here and elsewhere in the New Testament, (oikodomē), means “to build up... the act of one who promotes another's growth in Christian wisdom, piety, holiness, happiness.”

One of the primary reasons God established the fellowship of a local congregation is so that brethren could edify one another (Ephesians 4:11-16), *“for the edifying of itself in love.”* This brings to mind an important point, our emphasis should always be selfless. It is never to be what I want, but rather what will best serve my brothers and sisters. *“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.”*²⁴ *Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being”* (1 Corinthians 10:23-24).

This is based in the concept of agape love. Seeking the welfare of others before ourselves. *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her”* (Ephesians 5:25). Such love should transfer to our brethren (1 John 3:18).

- **Calls for us to edify one another:** Romans 15:1-3; Romans 14:19-21; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Titus 2:1; 1 Peter 2:11-12; Jude 20-23
- **Tools we can use in edification:** 1 Corinthians 14:26; Hebrews 10:24-25; Acts 20:28-32; 2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Peter 4:10; Colossians 3:16; Proverbs 9:9
- **The benefits of being built up:** 2 Peter 1:5-11; Galatians 5:16-18, 22-23

Thought Questions:

1. In what way can we say that the word of God is the primary tool we use in edifying each other?
2. Give examples of liberties we have that we could use to destroy others rather than building them up.
3. Are you capable of making it to heaven without the help of your brethren? Why or why not?
4. What is the best way for you personally to edify your brother and sisters in Christ?

To Do:

Loving Each Other

“Jesus answered him [a scribe], ‘The first of all the commandments is: “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these”” (Mark 12:29-31). The imperative to love is universal in scripture. God greatly emphasizes the requirement for Christians to love in the New Testament. All other things emanate from this obligation.

Love for God is defined in scripture as obeying Him (cf. 1 John 2:3-5). Love for men carries with it the idea of seeking what is best for them. It embraces all men. Your family, wife, husband, neighbor, even your enemy.

It especially includes your brothers and sisters in Christ. *“He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him”* (1 John 2:9-10). Fortunately such love is not subject to the whims of sentiment. It comes from the will, and every one of us can choose to practice it. As it is God’s imperative, it can not be emphasized to too great an extent.

- **The Christian’s call to love each other:** John 13:34-35; Romans 12:9-21; 1 Peter 4:8; 1 Corinthians 16;14; 1 John 4:7-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10; 1 John 3:10-15; 1 Peter 1:22; Hebrews 10:24-25; Galatians 5:13-15; Philippians 2:2
- **Passages that express what love is and how to love:** 1 Corinthians 13:1-8; Luke 10:25-37

Thought Questions:

1. From whence does God’s call for us to love one another come?
2. Is a mere profession from the lips sufficient when it comes to love?
3. Discuss the concept of love. Is it devoid of affection, or does it lead to affection?
4. Does a brother’s unlovable nature excuse us from the imperative to love each other?
5. What is the end of those who refuse to practice such love? (cf. 1 John 2:11; 3:14-15)

To Do:

Praying for Each Other

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

Prayer is a central part of the Christian’s life. God has chosen to communicate His will for us through His revealed word. We communicate our needs, praise and petitions to Him through the mediation of His Son (cf. 1 Timothy 2:5). This means is available to us as a matter of our relationship to God through His Son. There our petitions have a direct path to the Almighty in heaven. *“Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints” (Revelation 5:8).*

Consider the uses of prayer. Not only can we praise God, and ask blessings for ourselves, but we can petition God on behalf of others! As we continue to contemplate the imperative of love, and that true love is seen in acts of devotion, it is difficult to think of anything more loving than praying for your spiritual family.

- **The importance of prayer:** Psalm 148:18-19; James 5:16; Mark 11:22-24; Hebrews 4:16; Matthew 26:36-41; Jeremiah 33:1-3; Matthew 7:7-11; 1 John 5:14-15
- **Intercession for others:** 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Ephesians 6:17-20; James 5:16; Luke 6:27-28; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-4; Philippians 1:9-11; Ephesians 1:15-21
- **How to pray:** 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Luke 18:1-8; 1 John 5:14-15; James 5:16; Matthew 6:5-15; Mark 11:22-24; James 1:5-8; Romans 12:10-13

Thought Questions:

1. What does Matthew 6 teach to be the major considerations of prayer?
2. What are typical needs of others that we might include in our intercessory prayers?
3. What constitutes an effective prayer to our Father in heaven?
4. How might our prayers for one another help our relationship as brethren?
5. Examine your daily prayer life. Is there room for improvement? Does anyone have suggestions they might offer to the rest of us?

To Do:

Esteeming Each Other

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Philippians 2:3). Esteeming others better than ourselves reflects humility. It is an important part of the Christian life (just like the concept of love). Consider that every sin has as its origin the pride of man. If you see something you want, and choose it over God’s will, you have failed to show humility toward Him. The same is true with fleshly desires, and positions of glory and honor. Choosing them over God’s will is prideful (cf. 1 John 2:16).

Pride corrupts every facet of our life. It not only interferes with our faithfulness to God, it poisons friendships, destroys marriages, and brings neglect to family. It also causes strife in the church. This is why Paul told Euodia and Syntyche “to be of the same mind in the Lord” (Philippians 4:2).

Love and Humility are the two aspects of the Christian’s character that make the child of God so different from the world. While the world trumpets pride, selfishness, and a skewed view of what brings worth, the child of God heeds the words of Jesus, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5).

- **God’s call for us to be humble:** James 4:1-10; Micah 6:8; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Romans 12:3; Psalm 25:9-10; 1 Corinthians 1:27-29; Matthew 23:11-12
- **How humility impacts our relationship with each other:** Colossians 3:12-13; Philippians 2:1-4; 1 Peter 3:8-9; Philippians 2:5-8
- **The sin of selfish pride:** Proverbs 3:34; Daniel 4:28-37; Isaiah 66:1-2; 3 John 9-11

Thought Questions:

1. Explain how pride and self-exaltation can lead to strife in the local church.
2. Was Demas prideful or humble as he is mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:10?
3. Explain the concepts of humility and pride using 1 Corinthians 3:1-7.
4. Talk of ways we can “esteem others better than” ourselves (cf. Philippians 2:3).
5. How do you think the tax collector would feel if he heard the prayer of the Pharisee in Luke 18:11-12?

To Do:

The Sweet Counsel of a Friend

“Ointment and perfume delight the heart, and the sweetness of a man’s friend gives delight by hearty counsel” (Proverbs 27:9). The word counsel in the text (Hebrew, *‘ēṣâ*) simply means advice. There has always been the need for the advice of others. Scripture is full of references to the powerful who used counselors or advisers in making important decisions.

You may have noted that this verse comes from the same chapter where we got our theme verse. “*Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another*” (Proverbs 27:17 ESV). We revisit our theme scripture with the ESV translation, which clearly indicates the effect that one Christian can have on another. This can happen through the giving of good advice during difficult times. Though not limited to tribulation, the counsel of a friend is beneficial and should be greatly appreciated by all of us.

We are not talking about being a “know it all”, or a “*busybody in other people’s matters*” (1 Peter 4:15). Often a brother or sister in Christ can be floundering, and a gentle piece of sagacity is greatly appreciated by them in their struggles or needs.

- **It is difficult, but needed, to accept good advice:** Proverbs 11:14; 12:15; 12:26; 13:10 (ESV); 15:21-24; 19:20; 24:6; Ephesians 4:29; Ecclesiastes 4:13
- **Often, “it’s none of my business” indicates a lack of love:** Galatians 6:1-2; 1 Corinthians 5:1-2; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Matthew 18:15-17; Hebrews 10:24-25; Hebrews 13:17
- **Examples of good counsel in scripture:** Genesis 41:33-37; 1 Kings 12:6-7; Exodus 18:14-24; 1 Samuel 3:1-10; Esther 4:13-14; Proverbs 31:1-9; Joshua 24:14-15

Thought Questions:

1. Of all the examples of good counsel in scripture (listed here or not), which is a favorite, and why?
2. How can offering advice to a fellow Christian be an expression of love for them?
3. What is the best piece of spiritual advice you have received? Willing to share it?
4. Why is it sometimes difficult to accept good counsel from your brethren?

To Do:

Hospitality !

“But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Hebrews 13:16). Hospitality is another example of how we are to love one another. The Greek word for hospitable (philoxenos) is a compound word. The word (philo) indicates love or affection. The word (xenos) is usually translated stranger. Literally, “a love for strangers”, the word is defined as: fond of guests; given to hospitality.

Hospitality had great value in ancient times as seen time and again in scripture. The first example of hospitality we see is Abraham receiving three strangers in Genesis 18. *“So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate”* (8). These three were from God, and this shows the truth of Hebrews 13:2, *“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.”*

Hospitality is not limited to strangers. It is an integral part of showing love for our brethren. *“Be hospitable to one another without grumbling”* (1 Peter 4:9).

- **Hospitality is commanded by God:** Hebrews 13:1-2; 1 Peter 4:9; Romans 12:10-13; Leviticus 19:33-34; Matthew 25:34-40
- **Hospitality and benevolent considerations to brethren:** 2 John 9-11; Acts 11:27-30; Acts 17:5-9; Acts 18:1-3; Acts 21:4, 7-10; Philippians 4:10-19
- **Examples of hospitality:** Acts 2:46; 1 John 5-8; Joshua 2:1-21; 1 Kings 17:8-24; Ruth 2-4:12; Luke 10:38-42; Luke 19:1-10

Thought Questions:

1. One way to be hospitable is to have some in your home for a meal or gathering. What are other ways we can show our hospitality to others?
2. This lesson combines hospitality and benevolence, how are the two similar?
3. Can you practice hospitality for the wrong reasons? (cf. Luke 14:12-14)
4. What are the challenges to hospitality in our culture? How can we overcome them?
5. How do you feel when you receive hospitality from your brethren?

To Do:

Physical Considerations in our Relationship

“Honor widows who are really widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God” (1 Timothy 5:3-4). The loss of health is a truth that hits hard in just about every family. It is not surprising that God has made accommodations for those who are suffering from age, injury or ill health. Just as our children have needs they can not supply on their own, those who are older often become dependent upon our care.

One example of this concerned the widows in the early church. It was the practice of the church in Jerusalem to serve tables (cf. Acts 6:2). After some problems occurred, they appointed spiritually mature men to take care of the needs in the church at that time.

The greatest responsibility in this regard is an individual one. This can be seen from the 1 Timothy verse above. While the church is sometimes charged with helping widows or indigent saints, God expects individual initiative to take the lead in this.

- **Respect for the elderly:** Exodus 20:12; Leviticus 19:32; Proverbs 16:31; John 19:25-27; Matthew 15:1-9; 1 Peter 5:5; Job 12:12; Proverbs 23:22
- **The New Testament responsibility to help others:** James 1:27; Luke 10:30-37; Acts 3:1-10; Acts 9:36, 39; Matthew 7:12; Galatians 6:2; 1 Corinthians 12:23-26
- **Jesus showed compassion to those who suffered:** Matthew 9:35-36; Mark 1:40-41; Matthew 20:29-34; Matthew 14:14-21; John 15:13, 19:30

Thought Questions:

1. Consider your physical family. Is there more that you can and should be doing for the infirm or needful in your own family?
2. Take inventory of our congregation. Examine every member. Is there a physical, emotional or spiritual need that they might have? What can you do for them?
3. How have you treated your elders in your life. Is there anything you need to do in those relationships to improve them or show your devotion?
4. God wants us to help the poor, the oppressed, the young, the lonely, the old. Can you think of other special circumstances that should activate our compassion?

To Do:

My Individual Responsibility to Accept Your Friendship

“The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.” (Ruth 2:12). The preceding verse notes what Boaz said to Ruth because of her gracious actions toward his kinswoman Naomi. This represents an important social contract that exists among the righteous, as we consider what God requires of us. We have the responsibility to be of help to others, but we must also graciously accept the help they are offering to us!

Consider Matthew 25 with this perspective. Those accepted by the King and Judge were blessed by Him. *“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world”* (34). They were blessed by God because they had helped others. They had the opportunity and did what they needed to do. Would you refuse to allow such rewards by refusing to grant them the opportunity to help you?

We are always to be ready and willing to help our brothers and sisters. It is a shame if any of us does not ask for or allow such help because we don't want to be a burden, or because it is too much trouble, or because others have their own troubles. Such an attitude impedes our efforts to do what God expects us to do as brethren.

- **Look at these verses as the one receiving the help:** Philippians 2:1-4; 4:15-19; Hebrews 13:16; Proverbs 19:17; Acts 20:32-35; Proverbs 22:9; Deuteronomy 15:11
- **Jesus' teaching regarding service:** John 13:1-17; Mark 9:33-37; Mark 10:35-45
- **We all need help!:** Mark 2:1-5; Exodus 17:11-13; Acts 4:32-37; Acts 9:26-30; Acts 11:19-26; 2 Timothy 4:9-16; John 6:4-9

Thought Questions:

1. Is it hard for you to accept help from others? If so, what is the reason? Do you consider it a burden to them? Do you feel that way yourself?
2. Have you ever been a great help to someone in need? Were you blessed by your efforts?
3. The apostle Paul greatly benefited from the efforts of others. Why was he so grateful for what they did?
4. Review these lessons, and your notes. Do your best to remain zealous in your efforts to serve the Lord by serving your brethren (cf. Revelation 3:15-16).

To Do: