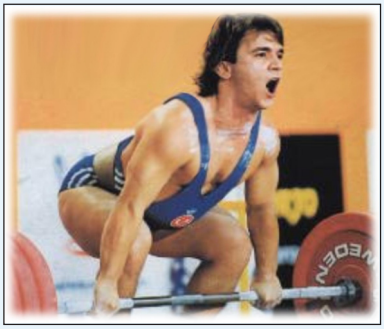
Developing spiritual iron-men

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- Weight lifting champion Naim Suleymanoglu

Affliction, like the iron-smith,
shapes as it smites - Christian Nestell Bovee

Firmly helping young men achieve their potential

Mature Christian men do well to promote spiritual iron-man development as they disciple younger believers, according to the wisdom of Proverbs 27:17 - *As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another*. That ancient maxim encourages men to meet together, and sharpen each other. But it causes us to wonder exactly how iron may be sharpened by iron, and reflect on how the sharpening of iron relates to interacting men, and how they benefit one other.

Clearly, the cold and hard iron hammer is necessary to shape the hot and soft un-formed iron rod, forging it into a sharp sword or spear. So the proverb is not simply a call for men to fellowship; it is a call for those who are spiritually well-formed to shape and sharpen the "hot-headed" young men, who seek to gain spiritual maturity. It requires someone to teach while others must listen. Therefore - *Young men... be submissive to those who are older* (I Peter 5:5), otherwise wisdom will be lost. Paul therefore taught Timothy by giving him a list of leadership ideals that may challenge young men today (I Timothy 3:1-7).

> *... Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.*

Encouraging maturity as a man of God

Elder-statesmen in the faith do well to mentor young men toward crowning Jesus as Lord, with a keen ambition for excellence - especially as follows:

Devoted and positive attitude: Each young man should seek to be refreshed by regular fellowship, along with daily prayer and Bible study. This enables deeper authenticity as we bear the image of God - who *loves a cheerful giver*, (II Corinthians 9:7) whose sons rightly aim to be tender-hearted and joyful.

Self-discipline: Aspiring towards excellence, the man of God seeks coaching from mentors who will advise on self-governance, similar to the champion athlete who *goes into strict training* (I Corinthians 9:25). Gaining self-control, he avoids fleshly anger. Since aggressive thoughts undermine creativity, they must be overcome - as Paul taught: *train yourself to be Godly* (I Timothy 4:7).

Exercise and nutrition: Young men ideally engage in daily physical exercise (I Timothy 4:8) as it boosts immunity, energy, and well-being, while managing stress and weight. Like each wise prince, men should *eat at a proper time - for strength and not for drunkenness* (Ecclesiastes 10:17), avoiding unhealthy food, in favour of wholesome nutrition with plenty of water (Daniel 1:11-16).

Rest and recreation: Aspirational young men should seek to refresh mind and body, so as to promote calmness. Many key inventions and technological breakthroughs (eg the sewing machine) have occurred as people relaxed and allowed creative thoughts to flow - apart from tension, worry and stress.

Having fun: The man of God seeks to have more fun in life and work. Are Christians dull and boring, or creative and exciting? Is God dull and boring or creative and exciting? The challenge is for us to respond to tough situations by thinking: *Let's have some fun with this problem*. Each man of God sets goals and seeks to grow - by attending seminars, motivational meetings, and studying great achievers, explorers, statesmen, visionaries, along with important books (Daniel 1:4). He enriches his workspace with mementos of success, portraits of heroes, inspirational quotations and poems. His personal development also involves achieving confident and competent written and oral expression.

When young men are developed personally, on the basis of faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord, they do well to take opportunities to serve God by seeking to marry and establish a family, that will become strongly active within a local church, and which will make a vital contribution to the wider community.

Excelling as a family man

Development as a husband: A Godly man may be taught to marry and serve one woman, daily expressing Christ-like love that seeks her highest good, as love *is not self-seeking*, and *keeps no record of wrongs* (I Corinthians 13).

Excellence as a father: A Godly man resolves to patiently love his children, providing both quality and quantity time with them. Patterned after the divine example, he testifies to the fatherhood of God - by generosity and sacrificial service, that additionally qualifies him for leadership, as the basis of ministry.

Stakeholding in a local congregation

Mature believers set an example when they do *not give up meeting together* (Hebrews 10:25), but engage actively - instead of remaining aloof or passive. A man who is a team player will do whatever the group needs. He supports the leadership of the church, and helps in any way. When he notices a problem, he doesn't conclude, "Someone else can fix it," but he remedies the situation.

Enriching the community

Development as a workman: The man of God heeds the biblical precept: *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men* (Colossians 3:23). He aims to be like Jesus, of whom it was said: *"He has done everything well"* (Mark 7:37). Characterised by thoroughness in all he does, his integrity is shown by high quality workmanship. Talking less, and doing more, he applies the Churchill family motto: *Action this day*.

Development as a community man: Young men may be taught to become good citizens who engage in service that enriches the locality and the nation. This may be guided by reflecting on the famous saying of Francis de Sales: *Great occasions for serving God come seldom, but little ones surround us daily.* Thus Godly men may gain *a good reputation with outsiders* (I Timothy 3:7).

Young men may cultivate the ambition to provide Christ-honouring influence that enriches the community. All Christians are called to leadership in some way, as noted in Hebrews 5:12 *... by this time you ought to be teachers ....* Leadership may be given by Christians who are not ambitious for themselves. Like John the Baptist, they may say about Jesus: *"He must become greater; I must become less"* (John 3:30). Jesus will become better recognised as each man of God aspires to leadership, and gently asserts the claims of Christ in all areas: individually, in the family, the church, at work, and in the community.

Impressing awareness of Jesus - the man from heaven

As mature Christian men help younger believers to place their hope in Jesus, who by his dying and rising is *bringing many sons to glory* (Hebrews 2:10), it is crucial to impress a thorough awareness of the life, work, and character of Christ - who came as fully God and fully man, so he could reveal the Father.

As the *man from heaven* (I Corinthians 15:47), Jesus came to earth and here was *tempted in every way* (Hebrews 4:15) - but he resisted by quoting the truth. Rejecting the way of sinful man, he served like his Heavenly Father:

When people were despised, Jesus was *a friend of tax collectors and sinners* (Matthew 11:19). While children were viewed as annoying, he welcomed them, and *placed his hands on them* (19:13-15). When the outcast Samaritan woman drew water at noon, by herself, Jesus befriended her (John 4:1-26).

Jesus was considered mad by his own family who *went to take charge of him* (Mark 3:21). He was called *a Samaritan and demon-possessed* (John 8:48), *raving mad* (10:20), and *a mere man* (10:33). Pharisees, *sneering at Jesus* (Luke 16:14), *laid plans to trap him in his words* (Matthew 22:15). Christ was laughed at, when he said a dead girl was asleep (9:24). He wept - but was not subject to emotion. He was meek - but not weak. Rebuking the arrogant, Jesus *looked around at them in anger* (Mark 3:5), but was kind to the humble. Exercising controlled anger, he platted a whip and drove the cattle out of the temple, overturning the tables, but he submitted to unjust trial and scourging.

When men accused him falsely, Jesus did not quarrel. Although he could have summoned angels to rescue him, Christ remained silent. When pierced with nails of iron, he prayed that the soldiers would be forgiven. After death, he returned to life, and when doubted, he gently showed Thomas the proof.

Though Jesus was three times denied, he reinstated Peter to be a fisher of men and gently rebuked him three times by asking: *"Do you love me?"* So it may be said of Jesus - and all true colleagues - *Faithful are the wounds of a friend* (Proverbs 27:6). May Christ continue to work in all men, enabling us to shape and sharpen one another for service in the kingdom - *as iron sharpens iron*.

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