
“A Friend Loves at All Times”

On the Adversity That Reveals True Brotherhood

by Oludare Akinbo

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

“There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” — Proverbs 18:24 NKJV

This reflection takes Proverbs 17:17 — at its plainest a celebration of true friendship and true brotherhood — and follows its weight outward into a question the rest of Scripture takes up at length: who proves to be such a friend or brother when adversity arrives, and how should the one walking through trouble respond to what is revealed? Wisdom literature, the lament psalms, the gospel accounts, ordinary life, and a set of honest self-examination questions are drawn together so that the reader may both honour the genuine where it is found, examine themselves humbly where they have fallen short, and respond with the mercy and gratitude the moment deserves.

The Test That Cannot Be Faked

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

— Proverbs 17:17 NKJV

At its plainest, this verse celebrates what a true friend and a true brother actually are: the one who loves at all times, and the one who, by his very design, appears when adversity arrives. The brother is not merely available in trouble; he is, in the proverb’s own language, born for it. But a description this exacting carries an inevitable corollary — it also becomes a measure.

That verse, then, strips relationships down to their true weight. It moves us away from labels — surname, shared background, loud declarations of loyalty — and places the measure where it cannot be faked for long: adversity.

It is easy to be surrounded by “friends” in seasons of ease. Many can laugh with you, agree with you, or stand near you when there is nothing at stake. But trouble reveals what titles cannot prove. Pressure exposes intent. Pain uncovers character.

Genuine friends and true brothers are not defined by proximity, words, or even long association. They are revealed in the moments when life tightens its grip — when you are fighting to stay steady, to keep your sanity, to hold your head above water. In those moments, a clear distinction begins to emerge.

What Labels Cannot Prove

Scripture is remarkably honest about how often blood, history, and even covenant language fail to translate into faithful presence. The names ‘brother’ and ‘friend’ are used everywhere in the Bible, but they are rarely accepted at face value. Again and again the text quietly distinguishes between what someone is called and what they are willing to carry.

Proverbs itself is chastened about the relational landscape. The same book that names the friend who loves at all times also warns that ‘A man who has many companions may come to ruin’ (Proverbs 18:24 NKJV), and reminds us that ‘Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful’ (Proverbs 27:6 NKJV). The wisdom tradition does not romanticise. It expects faithful friendship to be rare, costly, and willing to wound rather than flatter; and it warns that an abundance of casual companions is, by itself, no protection at all.

Nowhere is this honesty more sustained than in the lament psalms of David. He returned to this wound again and again in his songs — not in self-pity, but in the honest cry of a man whose closest ties had failed him. The very recurrence is itself a witness: the pain of being wronged by one who bears the title of friend, companion, or kin is so distinct from every other kind of pain that the psalmist felt compelled to name it from many angles.

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For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; Then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; Then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, My companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, And walked to the house of God in the throng.

— Psalm 55:12-14 NKJV

Notice the paradox the wounded heart recognises instinctively: the assault of an open enemy can be braced for; the assault of a companion strikes precisely where no defence has been raised. This Psalm has often been read in connection with Ahithophel — trusted counsellor and walking-companion to the house of God — who joined Absalom’s conspiracy, though the text itself names no specific occasion. Whatever the precise setting, the closeness of the relationship is exactly what made the wound so deep.

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They reward me evil for good, To the sorrow of my soul. But as for me, when they were sick, My clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting; And my prayer would return to my own heart. I paced about as though he were my friend or brother; I bowed down heavily, as one who mourns for his mother.

— Psalm 35:12-14 NKJV

Here David remembers his own conduct toward those who later turned on him: sackcloth when they were sick, fasting on their behalf, grief as for a brother or mother. The kindness was real. The return was bitter.

The lesson is not to withhold kindness in future — David never does — but to hold no illusions about the proof that kindness alone provides.

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In return for my love they are my accusers, But I give myself to prayer. Thus they have rewarded me evil for good, And hatred for my love.

— Psalm 109:4-5 NKJV

Sharper still: love itself returned as accusation. David’s response, however, is neither retaliation nor silence; it is prayer. The path from being wronged by one who bore your title to remaining tender before God is a narrow one, and the Psalms walk it openly so that ordinary believers may find their footing on the same road.

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I have become a stranger to my brothers, And an alien to my mother’s children.

— Psalm 69:8 NKJV

Nor was the failure of those who should have stood with him confined to friends and counsellors. Even within his own household, by his own words, David knew the cold of estrangement. The title of brother, the shared mother, the common blood — none of these were proof against being treated as a foreigner. And the same ache appears in the experience of our Lord Himself, of whom John records that ‘His own brothers did not believe in Him’ (John 7:5) — a parallel of experience the gospels invite us to feel, even where the New Testament does not cite this verse explicitly as fulfilment.

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All who hate me whisper together against me; Against me they devise my hurt. ‘An evil disease,’ they say, ‘clings to him. And now that he lies down, he will rise up no more.’ Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me.

— Psalm 41:7-9 NKJV

And one final lament, perhaps the most striking of all because of how the New Testament receives it. The Psalmist moves from the whispering of distant enemies, to the cruel speculation muttered over a sick man’s bed, to the act of a closest companion — a familiar friend, one who shared his bread, who turns and lifts a heel against him. David did not write these words about a stranger; he wrote them about someone

seated at his own table. That is the very nature of the test Proverbs 17:17 sets up. It is precisely those closest to us, those most trusted, whose response to our trouble carries the heaviest meaning.

The Christian tradition has long read this Psalm as messianic at its deepest level — David’s wound prefiguring the ultimate betrayal of the Son. And it is no accident: Jesus Himself quoted this very Psalm at the Last Supper, applying it to Judas (John 13:18). One of the Twelve. One who had shared the bread, walked the dusty roads, witnessed the miracles, and called Him ‘Rabbi.’ Yet adversity, when it came in the form of thirty pieces of silver, revealed what title and proximity had concealed for three years. The Davidic laments find here their climax: the suffering they describe is not only David’s, but is, in the providence of God, a foreshadow of the suffering of David’s Son.

Adversity as Revealer: Three Patterns It Uncovers

When trouble comes, those around us tend to reveal themselves in one of three patterns. The first two are failures of differing kind, but the third — too often forgotten when we have been wounded — belongs squarely to the gospel and must be named alongside them, lest our discernment harden into something Scripture never permitted.

Those Who Withdraw

The first kind simply disappears. The phone calls thin out. The visits stop. The invitations dry up. They do not openly oppose you; they just become hard to find. Their conversation, once warm, becomes brief and distracted. Their excuses become slightly too convenient. Often they are not even consciously avoiding you — they are simply uncomfortable, and discomfort wins.

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My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague, and my relatives stand afar off.

— Psalm 38:11 NKJV

The Psalmist names it precisely: not enemies, but loved ones; not strangers, but friends. They stand at a distance. There is no shouting, no confrontation, just absence. The silence becomes its own message. Job experienced the same:

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My relatives have failed, and my close friends have forgotten me.

— Job 19:14 NKJV

Those Who Add to the Burden

The second kind is more troubling, because their failure is active rather than passive. These are the ones who, faced with your vulnerability, do not withdraw — they exploit. They criticise when comfort was called for. They speculate when discretion was owed. They circulate the details of your trouble as conversation pieces. Some take the opportunity to settle old scores, knowing you are too weakened to push back. Others moralise from a safe distance, dressing self-righteousness in spiritual language.

Job’s three friends are the unforgettable picture of this — and they remain so precisely because they began well. They arrived in genuine concern; they sat in silence for seven days; only afterward, when Job opened his mouth in lament, did the well-meant theology begin. They did not curse him; they did not abandon him. They simply added the weight of their misdiagnosis to a man already crushed under a trial they could not understand. At a deeper level still, the divine rebuke at the close of the book exposes the gravity of their failure: ‘My wrath is aroused against you... for you have not spoken of Me what is right’ (Job 42:7 NKJV). Their sin was not chiefly poor bedside manner; it was misrepresenting God under the guise of defending Him — forcing a rigid doctrine of retribution onto a sufferer whose case did not fit it. Their account is preserved as a mirror for every comforter who has ever felt the urge to explain a sorrow rather than sit beside it, and for every theologian who has spoken confidently for God in a season where silence and humility would have served better.

Those Who Fail and Are Restored

The witness of Scripture, however, is not finished with the two failures. A third pattern, no less honest about human weakness but far more hopeful about divine grace, must be named alongside them. Some who fail in the hour of testing are later restored — and in the gospel economy, restoration is not a footnote but a major theme.

Peter is the unforgettable example. He denied Christ three times in the courtyard of the high priest, in the very night the Lord had asked him to stay close (Luke 22:54–62). By the measure of those who withdraw, his failure was as clear as it could be. Yet weeks later, on a Galilean shore, the risen Christ met him at the very kind of fire that had heard his denial and, with a threefold ‘do you love Me?’, made room for restoration (John 21:15–17). The man who failed in adversity became the rock on whom the church was built, the apostle who preached at Pentecost, the one who would eventually give his life rather than deny his Lord again.

John Mark is another. He abandoned Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey, severely enough that Paul refused to take him on the second (Acts 15:37–39). For a season he was, by Paul’s own assessment, unfit for the work. Yet years later, from prison, Paul writes: ‘Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry’ (2 Timothy 4:11 NKJV). The same man who failed early is now profitable in the gospel.

Three lessons follow. First, when we identify those who have failed us in adversity, we must hold the verdict with an open hand. The gospel makes room for restoration in ways our wounded judgement does not, and some whom we have rightly noted as unfaithful in one season will, by grace, prove faithful in another. Second, when we are the one who has failed — and there are seasons every honest believer can name — the example of Peter and Mark is not abstract consolation. It is gospel. The Christ who restored them restores us. Third, the wisdom of marking who has failed remains real, but our marking is provisional, watching for the work of God, never the final word about a person whom God Himself has not yet finished with.

A QUIET NOTE ON DISCERNMENT

It is worth saying clearly: identifying these three patterns is not bitterness. It is wisdom. Scripture itself names the differences plainly and tells us not to be naive about them. The Proverbs were written precisely so that the simple might gain prudence (Proverbs 1:4), and the gospel is preached so that the fallen might be restored. To see what has been revealed — in others and in ourselves — is not to harbour resentment, nor to write anyone off, but to steward our trust honestly going forward while leaving room for the work of God in every life He has not yet finished with.

Biblical Witnesses to False Companionship

Scripture refuses to romanticise human loyalty. It records, with painful honesty, the failures of those who walked closest to its great men — and it does so not to embitter us, not to invite our judgment of those long dead, but to instruct those of us still living. The accounts are preserved as mirrors, not as verdicts.

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Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

— 1 Corinthians 10:11 NKJV

Paul is unmistakable on the purpose of these accounts. They are ‘for our admonition’ — set down so that we, the latter generations on whom the ends of the ages have arrived, might watch ourselves. We read them not from a safe distance of moral superiority, but as those who could just as easily slip into the same patterns if we are not watchful. The right posture is humility: a quiet ‘Lord, let me not be that one,’ rather than the complacency that imagines we would surely have done differently. The faces in these accounts may be ancient. The temptations they faced are not. They are ours.

And the lesson runs in both directions. The same humility that bids us look into these accounts honestly for our own sake must also shape how we look upon the failures of those still around us. The God who has met our own blind spots, our cowardices, our quiet betrayals of trust, with patience, mercy, and unflinching compassion has not done so in order that we might become harsher judges of others. He has done so to teach us His own ways — so that, having received mercy ourselves, we might extend it freely. To read Scripture humbly is therefore to come away both more vigilant for ourselves and more gentle with everyone else: quicker to pray for the one who has failed, slower to consign them, more attentive to the state of our own heart than to theirs.

Joseph and His Brothers

Few stories cut more sharply than Joseph’s. The very ones who shared his father, his bloodline, his tribal identity — who carried the same surname, who ate at the same table — acted against him in ways the text records without flinching (Genesis 37:18–28). The account is preserved not to single out the sons of Jacob for our condemnation, but to caution every reader who comes after them. Envy, resentment, and the fear that another’s favour somehow diminishes our own are temptations that visit families in every generation. We are meant to read this story with the prayer that, when our turn comes to hold a brother’s vulnerability in our hands, we will hold it well.

The Disciples in Gethsemane

On the night of Jesus’ greatest agony, He asked only one thing of His closest companions: “Stay here and watch with Me” (Matthew 26:38). Three times He returned. Three times He found them sleeping. It was not the active betrayal Judas was about to commit, nor the open denial Peter would later weep over. It was the more ordinary failure of the spirit being willing while the flesh was weak — a failure none of us can read about without recognising in ourselves. The Lord Himself diagnosed it gently rather than harshly: ‘watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation’ (Matthew 26:41). The text invites us to the same watchfulness, not the easy assumption that we would have stayed awake.

Paul and Demas

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For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world.

— 2 Timothy 4:10 NKJV

Demas had been Paul’s fellow worker (Philemon 24; Colossians 4:14). They had laboured together in the gospel. Yet when imprisonment and danger thickened around the apostle, the cost grew heavier than Demas could bear, and he departed. Paul names what happened plainly — without curse, without bitterness. The account is preserved less as a verdict on Demas than as a sober reminder to every disciple who reads it: the love of this present world can quietly draw any of us away from the harder commitments we once made, unless our hearts are kept tender and watchful before God.

Paul’s First Defence

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At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.

— 2 Timothy 4:16 NKJV

Notice the tone. Paul records the abandonment, but in the very next breath asks that it not be charged against those who left. He has been wounded; he has named the wound; and yet he chooses mercy. This is the model the apostle leaves us: see plainly, name honestly, and refuse the lodging of bitterness in the heart. Few seasons reveal the maturity of a believer more clearly than how they speak of those who failed to stand with them.

The Brother Born for Adversity

And then there are the others — the ones Proverbs speaks of. They show up. Not always with perfect words, but with presence. Not always with solutions, but with sincerity. They steady you when you are shaking, remind you of truth when your mind is clouded, and stand beside you when it would be easier to step away. They do not exploit your weakness; they protect it. They do not magnify your pain; they help you carry it.

These are your friends. These are your brothers. These are your family.

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There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

— Proverbs 18:24 NKJV

Proverbs goes further than even blood. *Closer than a brother* — the writer reaches for the highest natural category of loyalty and then names something higher still. Some bonds, forged in covenant rather than blood, prove more reliable than family of origin. Adversity is the moment those bonds are made visible.

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Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.

— Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 NKJV

Biblical Witnesses to True Brotherhood

Just as Scripture records the failures, it also enshrines the faithful — the men and women whose names live on precisely because they refused to flinch when proximity became costly.

Jonathan and David

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The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

— 1 Samuel 18:1 NKJV

Jonathan had every earthly reason to be David’s rival. He was Saul’s son, the natural heir to the throne that David would one day occupy. By every dynastic calculation, David was a threat to his future. Yet Jonathan saw what his father refused to see — that the Lord’s hand was upon David — and aligned himself with that providence rather than against it. When Saul’s rage turned murderous, it was Jonathan who warned David, Jonathan who covenanted with him, Jonathan who chose loyalty to a friend over the protection of his own succession. The narrative is more than a story of human friendship; it is also one of recognising God’s anointing on another and refusing to fight against it. He proved — in the very season that should have made him David’s enemy — to be the brother born for adversity.

Ruth and Naomi

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Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.

— Ruth 1:16 NKJV

Naomi had nothing left to offer Ruth. No husband, no sons, no land, no security — only old age, foreign citizenship, and bitter sorrow. By every transactional measure, Ruth should have done what Orpah did and returned home. Instead she bound herself to a destitute widow and walked into a future she could not see. She did not have to. That is what made her presence costly, and that is what made it true. The book reveals the larger work being done through that costly loyalty: from this Moabite woman’s faithfulness comes the line of David, and ultimately the line of Christ Himself (Matthew 1:5). The hidden lesson of Ruth is that the brother — or sister — born for adversity often does not know what redemptive purposes their faithfulness is serving in the unseen counsels of God.

Aaron and Hur

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But Moses’ hands became heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.

— Exodus 17:12 NKJV

Moses was not in personal danger that day. He was simply tired. The battle below depended on his uplifted hands, and his arms could not hold the position alone. Aaron and Hur did not give a speech, perform a miracle, or fight in his place. They simply stood beside him — one on each side — and held him up. That is

often the entire ministry of a true brother: not heroic intervention, but the quiet, unspectacular work of being there until the battle is over.

Onesiphorus and Paul

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The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me.

— 2 Timothy 1:16-17 NKJV

Paul was in prison in Rome, awaiting execution. Association with him was politically dangerous. Many in Asia had already turned away (2 Timothy 1:15). But Onesiphorus did the opposite — he travelled to Rome, searched the city until he found Paul, and refreshed him repeatedly. The phrase ‘was not ashamed of my chain’ carries enormous weight. Standing beside a friend whose situation is shameful in the eyes of the world is one of the truest forms of brotherhood there is.

The Good Samaritan

Jesus deliberately chose the most unlikely figure in His parable to illustrate true neighbourliness (Luke 10:30-37). The priest passed by. The Levite passed by. The men of religious title and ethnic kinship had every reason to stop and every excuse not to. It was the Samaritan — the outsider, the man of ‘wrong’ lineage — who bound the wounds, carried the burden, paid the bill, and promised to return. The parable is, among other things, a permanent rebuke to anyone who assumes that title or proximity guarantees love.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus

At the cross, where the disciples scattered and the women watched from a distance, two unexpected men stepped forward. Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy and respected council member, asked Pilate for the body of Jesus — a request that would publicly mark him as a follower of an executed man (Mark 15:43). Nicodemus, who had once come to Jesus by night out of fear, joined him with a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes (John 19:39). Adversity moved them from private sympathy to public association. The moment of greatest shame became their moment of greatest courage.

Epaphroditus

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Because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.

— **Philippians 2:30 NKJV**

Epaphroditus risked his life to bring aid to Paul. He nearly died doing it. Paul calls him ‘my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier’ (Philippians 2:25). There is a particular form of brotherhood that emerges only under fire — the kind that is forged when comfort and safety are no longer on the table.

Ten Ways This Plays Out in Real Life

The verse is ancient, but its application is daily. Below are ten ordinary, modern situations in which a brother born for adversity — or the absence of one — becomes unmistakably visible. None of them is dramatic. All of them are decisive.

1 The Friend at the Hospital

A diagnosis lands. Word spreads quietly. Some send a single text and consider their duty done. One person clears their schedule, drives to the hospital without being asked, sits in the waiting room for hours, and returns again the next day. They bring no answers. They do not pretend to know what to say. They simply do not leave. That is the brother born for adversity.

2 The Quiet Defence in Your Absence

A colleague is being criticised in a meeting you are not attending. Easy reputations are made by joining the criticism; safe ones are made by saying nothing. The friend who steps in — calmly, without theatre — and corrects the record on your behalf has proven something that no compliment given to your face could ever prove.

3 The Late-Night Call That Gets Answered

There are calls one makes at hours one would never ordinarily disturb anyone. Most go to voicemail. A few are answered on the second ring, with no irritation, no 'is this important?', only 'what's wrong, where are you?' You will know your true brother by who answers that call.

4 The One Still at the Funeral

In the first week after a loss, sympathy is plentiful. In the third month, when the rest of the world has moved on and grief is at its loneliest, only a few remain who still call to ask how you are sleeping, who still mark the anniversary, who still say the name of the one you lost. Those few are family in the truest sense.

5 The Hard Truth Spoken Privately

Most people will either flatter you or talk about you. The friend who, behind closed doors, tells you the hard thing — about your decision, your marriage, your blind spot — is paying you a costly compliment. They are willing to risk your displeasure for the sake of your wellbeing. That is love that has chosen presence over popularity.

6 The Loan Without Calculation

A business collapses. Cashflow disappears. Most people, when approached, find polite reasons to refuse. One person quietly transfers the money, calls it a gift even when it was a loan, and never mentions it again. They are not foolish; they are faithful. They have measured the risk against the relationship and chosen the relationship.

7 The Intercessor When You Cannot Pray

There are seasons of spiritual exhaustion when even prayer becomes impossible. To know that someone, somewhere, is praying for you by name — not in vague terms but specifically, in detail, with persistence — is one of the great unseen kindnesses. The brother born for adversity carries you to God when you have no strength to carry yourself.

8 The One Who Refuses to Let You Isolate

Pain pulls inward. Shame closes the door. The natural instinct is to disappear from the people who care about you. The true friend does not accept this withdrawal. They keep texting after you have stopped replying. They show up at the door. They make space for your silence but refuse your invisibility. They will not let you vanish.

9 The Companion in the Hard Room

There are rooms one does not want to enter alone: the doctor’s office for the result, the police station for the statement, the court for the hearing, the lawyer’s office for the contested will. To have someone walk in beside you — not to speak for you, but simply to be visibly present — changes the entire weight of the room.

10 The Correction That Spares Public Exposure

The friend who notices a problem — a misstatement, a mistake, an oversight — and corrects you quietly before it becomes public has done you a service that gossip could never match. They have protected your dignity at the cost of their own comfort. They have proven, by their discretion, that they were never interested in your humiliation.

A Word for the One in Adversity

But the verse carries another quiet instruction for the one in pain. It is possible, in adversity, to withdraw — even from those who genuinely care. Hurt can make you suspicious. Disappointment in some can make you guarded toward all. There is a kind of bruised wisdom that protects itself by treating every offered hand as suspect.

This, too, must be resisted. The same test that reveals false companions also reveals true ones. When you have identified the few who have stood with you in sincerity, wisdom calls you not to push them away. Receive their presence. Allow their support. Let them be what they have proven themselves to be.

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Love empowers us to fulfill the law of the Anointed One as we carry each other’s troubles.

— Galatians 6:2 TPT

Burden-bearing requires two willing parties: one willing to carry, and one willing to be carried. The pride that refuses help is its own kind of unfaithfulness. The person who has proven themselves your brother in adversity is offering you, in their care, a foretaste of the love of Christ Himself. To refuse it is not strength. It is a quiet refusal of grace.

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Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend, nor go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity; better is a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.

— Proverbs 27:10 NKJV

The Proverb is realistic. Sometimes the brother by blood is far away, in heart or in geography. Sometimes the neighbour, the friend of years, the comrade who has shared the road, is closer to you than family of origin ever was. Honour that nearness. Do not forsake it in pursuit of the relationships you wish you had.

Ten Questions for Honest Self-Examination

Before turning the page on this reflection, sit quietly with these questions. Some will speak to how you have been treated. Others will speak to how you have treated others. Both directions matter, because the same Proverb that names true friendship as a gift also calls each of us to be the kind of person it describes.

1 Who has my recent adversity revealed?

When I think honestly about my last season of real difficulty, who showed up, and who quietly disappeared? Have I named these patterns clearly, or am I still pretending the distinction does not exist?

2 Am I confusing labels with loyalty?

Have I been giving heart-level access — my trust, my confidences, my vulnerability — to people on the basis of title (surname, long association, shared background) rather than on the basis of demonstrated faithfulness in trouble?

3 When others have suffered, what have I been?

When the trouble was someone else's and not mine, did I become a presence or an absence? Did I add to the burden through criticism, gossip, or moralising — or did I help carry it? What does the evidence of my own conduct say about me?

4 Have I withdrawn from those who have genuinely stood with me?

Out of pride, suspicion, shame, or simple exhaustion, have I been pushing away the very people who have proven themselves faithful? Is there a relationship I need to re-engage, an offer of help I have been quietly refusing?

5 Whose burden is God placing in front of me right now?

Is there someone in my circle whose adversity I have noticed but have not yet stepped toward? What would it cost me to act — a call, a visit, a transfer, a presence — and am I willing to pay that cost?

6 Am I more eager to be called a brother than to act like one?

Have I been content with the title — spoken at celebrations, claimed in introductions — without doing the unglamorous work that the title actually demands when difficulty arrives?

7 Have I received correction from those I have failed?

If someone I claimed to be a friend has, in their pain, accurately identified me as having been absent or unhelpful, how did I respond? Did I receive that as truth, or defend myself out of bruised pride?

8 Am I cultivating the inner character of a brother?

Brotherhood under pressure is not produced in the moment of crisis; it is produced in the years before. Am I cultivating patience, discretion, courage, prayerfulness, and presence — the qualities that become useful in another person's adversity?

9 Have I honoured those who have honoured me?

The people who proved themselves in my season of need — have I given them an honoured place in my life? Or have I returned to old patterns, treating them as ordinary while still drifting back to the comfort of less faithful relationships?

10 Am I receiving the love of Christ through the friends He has sent?

Every faithful friend is, in some sense, a vessel of the love of Christ Himself. Am I receiving their care as the gift it is — or holding it at arm's length out of a misplaced sense of self-sufficiency that Scripture nowhere commends?

A Final Word

Before the disciples slept in Gethsemane, Jesus had already chosen to love them to the end.

Before Demas departed, Onesiphorus had crossed an empire to find a man in chains.

Before Job’s friends spoke their first wrong word, three men had sat with him in silence for seven days.

Before Naomi knew it, Ruth had already decided that destitution beside her was better than comfort apart from her.

Before Moses’ hands grew heavy, two men were already standing at his sides.

Adversity is not only a burden — it is a revealer. It clarifies relationships with a precision that comfort never can. It shows who loves at all times and who was only present for a season. It distinguishes between those who carry your name and those who carry your burden.

And once seen clearly, you are responsible for what you do with that knowledge — both for those who failed the test, whom you must release with mercy and prudent distance, and for those who passed it, whom you must honour with the gratitude and faithfulness they have earned.

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Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.

— John 15:13 NKJV