

A FIELD GUIDE FOR MEN

The First Week

Walking a friend through a divorce, a firing, a diagnosis

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Something happened to your friend. His wife left, or the doctor called with news, or his boss walked him to his car with a box. That first weekend, everybody shows up. The texts come in, the casserole shows up on the porch, three guys stop by just to sit in his garage. It feels like the whole world noticed.

Then week two comes, and the world moves on. The texts slow down. The guys who stopped by have their own lives to run. Your friend is still standing in the wreckage, and the phone has gone quiet.

That's the part nobody warns you about. The crowd shows up for the explosion. Almost nobody shows up for the smoke that hangs around after. This guide is for the man who wants to be there for the smoke, not just the explosion. It won't make you a counselor. It'll help you not disappear, and it'll help you keep your mouth shut at the right moments.

1. Show up now, and show up in week three

Your first move matters less than you think. A text, a call, a knock on the door, any of it is fine. What actually matters is whether you're still around in three weeks, when the news has cooled and everyone else has stopped asking.

Put it on your calendar. I mean that literally. Set a reminder for two weeks out that says "check on him," because you will not remember on your own. Life will pull you back into your own routine, and it will pull him into isolation at the exact same time. Don't let the timing line up.

2. Don't explain what happened to him

You don't know why his marriage ended. You don't know why the cancer came back. You don't know why he got laid off two months before retirement. Stop reaching for a reason, because there usually isn't a tidy one, and reaching for one in front of him turns you into a man explaining his own pain back to him.

You don't know the reason. Job never got told his either. Saying "everything happens for a reason" out loud in his kitchen isn't comfort. It's you guessing, with his loss.

3. Don't fix it. You can't

A firing is not a resume problem. A divorce is not a communication problem. A diagnosis is not a nutrition problem. You will want to hand him a plan, because a plan feels like doing something and sitting with a man in pain feels like doing nothing. It isn't nothing. It's the harder thing.

There will be a season for advice. It's not week one, and it's usually not you who gets to decide when that season starts. He does.

4. Trade "let me know if you need anything" for a specific offer

"Let me know if you need anything" is a kind sentence that puts the work back on him. A man who's drowning does not have the energy to build you a task list. He'll say "I'm good" and hang up, and you'll feel like you tried.

Say the specific thing instead. "I'm bringing food Thursday, what do your kids eat." "I've got your yard Saturday morning, don't argue with me." "I'm picking you up at six, we're getting a burger, be ready." Concrete beats open-ended every time. A man in a hole doesn't need an invitation. He needs somebody to climb down and hand him a boot.

5. The ministry of just being there

Job lost his kids, his health, and everything he owned in a single stretch of days. Three friends heard about it and came.

Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, they came each one from his own place... Then they sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights with no one speaking a word to him, for they saw that his pain was very great. (Job 2:11, 13)

Seven days. No speeches. No advice. They just sat in the dirt with him. That's the part of the story worth copying. The part not worth copying is chapter four, when they finally opened their mouths and spent the next twenty-some chapters explaining Job's suffering to him. They were at their best when they said nothing.

You don't need words most of the time. You need a chair next to his and the willingness to not fill the silence.

6. Know when to speak and when to shut your mouth

Speak when he asks you something directly. Speak when he's about to do something that will hurt him or someone else, more on that below. Speak to remind him you're still there, still on his side, still not going anywhere.

Shut your mouth when you feel the urge to explain his loss to him, defend the person who hurt him, compare it to something that happened to you, or fill a silence that doesn't need filling. If you're not sure which one this is, it's almost always the second one. Silence with a friend in it is not a void you have to fix. It's a room he needs somebody in.

7. Watch his edges, not just his center

Grief and shock make men do things they wouldn't otherwise do. Quit the job before he has another lined up. Sign whatever the lawyer puts in front of him without reading it twice. Numb out with a bottle, a screen, or worse. Isolate until nobody's checking on him at all.

You're not his father and you're not his keeper. But if you're close enough to see the edges, say something. "Hey, I don't think you should do that tonight." "Let's wait till Monday before you sign that." A friend who stays quiet while another friend drives off a cliff isn't respecting his freedom. He's just avoiding an uncomfortable conversation.

If he ever talks about ending his life, don't try to carry that alone. Call or text 988. Veterans press 1. That's not a step you skip to keep the peace.

8. Point him to Christ, don't shove him there

He may not want to talk about God right now, and that's alright. Don't open every visit with a verse. Don't turn yourself into a walking sermon he has to sit through before he gets his burger.

But don't hide who holds you together either. If he asks how you're staying steady, tell him the truth. If it's right, pray for him out loud, short and plain, not a performance. Bring your Bible if he wants it, leave it in the truck if he doesn't. The goal isn't to win an argument about God in week one. It's to still be the guy who's there in year three, the guy he already knows believes something solid, so that when he's ready to ask, he already knows who to ask.

Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2)

That's the whole job. Carry some of the weight. You don't have to explain the weight to carry it.

The verses to have ready

Keep these on hand, not to recite at him, but for your own heart when you don't know what to say.

Galatians 6:2: "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."

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

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10: "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up."

Job 2:13: "Then they sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights with no one speaking a word to him, for they saw that his pain was very great."

Print it, save it, keep it in your truck. And put a second reminder on your calendar for week three. That's usually the one that matters most.

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