

A FIELD GUIDE FOR MEN

When He Falls

Showing up for a brother who relapsed, without shaming him or enabling him

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You just found out. Maybe he told you himself, voice shaking, waiting for you to hang up. Maybe you found out some other way, and now you're standing in your kitchen with your phone in your hand, not sure what to text back. He was doing so well. Weeks clean, maybe months. And now he isn't.

I'm not writing this because I have some formula that fixes him. I don't, and neither do you. I'm writing it because most of us have no idea what to do in this exact moment, and the two wrong moves are both easy to reach for. One is to come down on him like a judge. The other is to pretend it's fine and quietly clean up whatever mess he made so nobody has to feel it. Neither one is love. Both feel like something, in the moment, which is why men reach for them.

This isn't a program. It's a field guide for the next conversation, and the ones after it. Read it before you call him back.

1. Don't act shocked, and don't shame him

He already knows what he did. He does not need you to confirm it in a tone of voice. The second he hears disgust in your voice, or that flat "I can't believe you" silence, he will do exactly what shame always trains a man to do: hide, minimize, or disappear. Shame doesn't produce repentance. It produces better hiding.

So don't gasp. Don't ask "how could you" like the answer isn't obvious. Addiction is a war, not a math error, and he just lost a battle in a war he's still fighting. A relapse is not proof he was lying about wanting to change. It's proof the war is real.

Keep your first words simple. "I'm glad you told me. I'm not going anywhere." That's it. Save the conversation about what happens next for after he knows you're still standing there.

2. Restore him gently, and watch yourself while you do it

Scripture doesn't tell you to look away from sin in a brother. It tells you how to walk toward it.

"Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted." (Galatians 6:1)

Read that verse twice. It says restore, not punish. It says gentleness, not a lecture. And it puts a warning right in the same breath, aimed at you: watch yourself. The man doing the restoring is not exempt from falling. If you walk into this thinking you're the strong one handling the weak one, you've already missed what the verse is telling you to guard against in your own heart.

Gentleness is not the same as pretending it didn't happen. You can be gentle and still be honest. "This matters. I'm not going to act like it didn't happen. And I'm still here" can come out of the same mouth in the same conversation.

3. Know the difference between grace and enabling

This is where most men get lost, because grace and enabling can look identical from across the room. Both involve showing up. Both involve not walking away. The difference is what you're protecting.

Grace protects the man. Enabling protects the addiction.

Grace says: I love you, and I'm going to tell you the truth, and I'm not leaving. Enabling says: I love you, so I'm going to make this easier to keep doing. Covering for him at work. Handing him cash with no questions. Telling his wife a version of events that isn't quite true because you don't want to be the one who upsets her. Every one of those feels like loyalty in the moment. Every one of those is you doing his lying for him.

Ask yourself one question before you act: am I making it easier for him to face this, or easier for him to avoid it? If the answer is avoid it, stop.

4. Don't rescue him from every consequence

You cannot love a man out of the natural weight of his own choices, and you shouldn't try. If he wrecked trust with his wife, that trust has to be rebuilt slow, on her timeline, not smoothed over on yours. If he owes an apology, let him make it himself, in his own words, not one you drafted for him to make the awkwardness go away faster.

Consequences are not the enemy here. They're often what finally gets a man's full attention. Paul told the Galatians a man reaps what he sows, and that's not a threat, it's how God built things to work. Standing next to a man while he faces what he caused is love. Standing in front of him so he never has to face it is not.

This doesn't mean you get cold or start keeping score. It means you let his choices cost him something, while you stay close enough to walk through it with him.

5. Get him back to real help, fast

You are not his whole answer, and you were never meant to be. You are the brother who stands with him and helps him get to the people trained for this. If he had a sponsor, help him make that call today, not next week. If he was in a program, get him back in the room. If he's never had real help and has just been white-knuckling it, this relapse is the evidence he needs more than willpower and a friend who checks in sometimes.

Don't treat a counselor, a program, or a sponsor as a last resort for men who couldn't cut it on their own. That's backwards. Getting help is not weakness. Refusing it while everything falls apart around him, that's the weakness, and it's usually pride wearing a tough-guy mask.

If you don't know what's available, help him find out. A phone call to a local recovery program, a check on whether his insurance covers counseling, a ride to the meeting. Practical. Not abstract encouragement. Get him in front of someone trained for this.

And if at any point he says something that sounds like he doesn't want to be here anymore, take it seriously every time, no exceptions. If he is in danger, call 911. The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is free and it's there any hour of the day, call or text 988. If he's a veteran, he can dial 988 and press 1 to reach the Veterans Crisis Line directly. Do not wait to see if he means it.

6. Keep showing up. A fall is not the end of the story

"Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy. Though I fall I will rise; Though I dwell in darkness, the LORD is a light for me." (Micah 7:8)

That's a man who sinned and knows it. The very next verse says so. And he still says he will get up, because the light he's counting on is the Lord, not his own strength. That's the posture you want your brother to hear. Falling is not the thing that finishes a man. Staying down is. Scripture even says the righteous man falls and rises, over and over (Proverbs 24:16). If you're waiting for him to prove he's changed by never failing again, you're holding him to a standard God's own word doesn't hold him to.

This is why you don't disappear after relapse number one, or number three. Ecclesiastes says two are better than one, because when one falls, the other can lift him up, and pity the man who falls with no one there to help him up. That's your job description right there. Not judge. Lifter.

He needs to hear, again and again if that's what it takes, that this fall does not undo the ground he already gained. It does not make him hopeless. It does not make him unsaved. Grace has always met men in the fall, not just before it.

7. Guard your own heart while you're in this with him

"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall." (1 Corinthians 10:12)

That verse was written for you right now, not just for him. Watching a brother fall can make a man feel steady by comparison, and steady is a dangerous place to stand if it turns into

pride. It can also wear you down in ways you don't notice until you're short with your own family or numbing out with something of your own.

Being the guy who shows up for an addict is not a role you can run on empty. Have your own man in your corner. Pray honestly, not performing strength you don't have. If this is costing you more than you can carry alone, say that out loud to someone. You're allowed to need support while you're giving it.

8. Know when to bring in others, or a professional

You are not equipped to be his only lifeline, and trying to be is how good men burn out or make things worse. If he's in real danger, medical, legal, or to himself, bring in people trained for that. A counselor. A doctor. His sponsor. His pastor, if he has one who will handle this with the same gentleness Galatians 6:1 calls for and not with a hammer.

Bringing in more help isn't giving up on him. It's refusing to let his recovery rest on one exhausted friend who means well but isn't a doctor. A father with a broken leg still takes his son to the ER even though he loves him plenty on his own. Love that refuses backup isn't devotion. It's pride with worse consequences.

The verses to have ready

Keep these where you can find them fast, because you won't have time to search when the call comes.

Galatians 6:1: "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted."

Micah 7:8: "Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy. Though I fall I will rise; Though I dwell in darkness, the LORD is a light for me."

Proverbs 24:16: "For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, But the wicked stumble in time of calamity."

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."

1 Corinthians 10:12: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall."

If his life is in danger: Take it seriously, every time. Call 911 if he is in immediate danger. The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is available any time, call or text 988. Veterans can dial 988 and press 1 to reach the Veterans Crisis Line.

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