

**A friend loves at all times,
and a brother is born for adversity.
Proverbs 17:17 – A Proverbial Story
By Ted Hildebrandt and Chatgpt**

When the wildfire came roaring down the valley, it gave no warning and showed no mercy. Smoke swallowed the sun, and flames leapt like beasts hungry for anything that dared to stand.

Liam stood outside his family's modest cabin, watching the line of fire crawl closer over the ridge. His younger brother, Ben, was trapped on the other side of the river, where he had gone fishing early that morning. The phone lines were down. Roads were blocked. The evacuation sirens screamed through the smoke, but Liam couldn't leave—not without Ben.

“We have to go now!” shouted Kevin, Liam’s best friend since grade school, his pickup truck already loaded with supplies. “There’s no time!”

“My brother’s still out there,” Liam said, eyes fixed on the distant treeline, his voice raw.

Kevin hesitated, heart pounding. “Then I’m staying too.”

“What? No—you need to go.”

Kevin grabbed Liam by the shoulders. “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. Proverbs 17:17. You think I’m leaving you to face this alone?”

Together, they grabbed two gas masks from the truck and ran toward the river trail, hacking through brush and choking on smoke. The forest was unrecognizable. Birds had vanished. The trees groaned in the wind, some already glowing at the edges.

At the edge of the riverbank, Liam spotted a small figure waving frantically from the opposite shore—Ben, soaked and shivering but alive.

“The bridge is gone,” Kevin said, pointing to the smoldering ruins downstream.

Liam didn’t wait. He ran, kicking off his boots and diving into the icy water. The current was furious, swollen from the firefighting efforts upstream. He fought to stay upright, finally reaching a terrified Ben. Kevin shouted instructions from the other side, already preparing a rope he’d found in his pack.

With trembling hands and aching lungs, Liam hoisted Ben onto his shoulders and waded across the frigid river once again. By the time they reached the shore again, the fire was almost upon them.

They ran, half-dragging Ben between them, until they reached the truck, engine running, doors open. They sped down the only road still passable, the fire a roaring wall in the rearview mirror.

Later, at a crowded evacuation center, Liam sat beside his brother, holding a cup of water to Ben's lips. Kevin stood nearby, face smudged with ash, arms crossed.

"You should've left," Liam murmured.

Kevin shrugged. "Would've broken the rules."

"What rules?"

Kevin smiled. "Friends don't bail when things get hard. And brothers... well, brothers are born for this kind of thing."

Liam looked at him, weary and grateful. "I think that proverb works both ways."

They sat in silence as dawn broke through the smoke-stained sky.

"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." The words lingered, no longer just an ancient proverb, ink on paper, but a truth etched into the ashes of their memories.