

SENIOR ADULTS

# BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

TM

FALL 2013 | LEADER GUIDE  
RONNIE FLOYD | GENERAL EDITOR



PRESSURE POINTS  
WHEN RELATIONSHIPS COLLIDE

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This Leader Guide is designed for leaders of senior adults ages 70 and up. We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter, and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review LifeWay's doctrinal guideline, please visit [www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline](http://www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline).

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# PRESSURE POINTS



## **Pressure**—It's everywhere.

- ▶ Coaches and players are under pressure: “Win or else!”
- ▶ Business leaders face the pressure to make a profit.
- ▶ Teenagers feel the pressure to follow their peers.
- ▶ Seniors endure the pressure of declining health, loneliness, and stretching retirement income for an indefinite period of time.

Doctors prescribe medication like never before to help stressed people deal with the pressure of life.

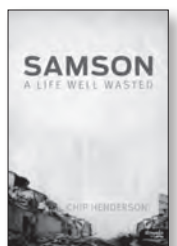
Pressure is nothing new. James, the half brother of Jesus, wrote to Jewish Christians in the first century who faced intense pressure. They had been dispersed because of persecution, and they faced increasing pressure to let faith live only in their heads instead of being lived out in their lives. They faced the pressure to wilt in times of trial and the pressure to compromise when facing temptation. They faced the pressure to cave in to prejudicial preference when welcoming people in their gatherings and to let their tongues wag out of control. They faced the pressure to demand their own way and the pressure to retaliate when mistreated and done wrong.

James beckoned these first believers to let the pressure push them deeper in their journey with Jesus. And James invites you to open your life to the truth of God's Word and learn how to deal positively with the pressure points of life. Pressure doesn't have to dismantle your faith. Let pressure lead you to experience the presence and power of God like never before.



“Pressure Points” was developed and written by Dr. Chip Henderson, senior pastor at Pinelake Church in Brandon, Mississippi. A graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Chip has been married for 21 years to Christy, and they have three children. He is an avid hunter, runner, and triathlete. Chip is the co-creator of the *L3 Journal* and the author of the young adult study *Samson: A Life Well Wasted* (LifeWay).

Chip's hope is that as you engage in this study, you will learn to handle life's pressures in a biblical way.





# SESSION 1

# THE PRESSURE OF TRIALS

## ***The Point***

Joyful trust in God will get you through any trial.

## ***The Bible Meets Life***

Trials hit us all, whether they are minor bumps in the road or major life-changing events. We may not be able to alter the trial we face, but we can change the way we think about it. What we don't often stop to consider is how God uses pressure points to transform us into His image. If we can see trials the way God sees them—as an opportunity for us to grow in our dependence on Him—it can change the way we approach them.

## ***The Passage***

James 1:1-4

## ***The Setting***

James wrote what is considered the earliest letter in the New Testament. He wrote to Jewish believers, providing practical principles for living the Christian life. From the earliest days of the church, believers have experienced trials that tested their faith, but we can rejoice in the midst of those trials because of the growth and endurance God is working into our lives.

## **GET INTO THE STUDY**



**10 minutes**

**SAY:** “For the next six weeks we will be examining how to deal with pressure in our lives.”  
(**ENHANCEMENT:** Direct attention to Pack Item 1: “Pressure Points.”)

**GUIDE:** Direct the group to look at the picture (see p. 14; **Personal Study Guide [PSG], p. 8**).

**DISCUSS:** “What pressures squeeze the joy out of life?” (PSG, p. 8).

**SAY:** “Trials hit us all. But how do we deal with them?”

**GUIDE:** Introduce **The Point** (PSG, p. 9): “Joyful trust in God will get you through any trial.”

**GUIDE:** Lead the group to scan **The Bible Meets Life** (PSG, p. 9). Stress that it can be a challenge to make lemonade from sour circumstances.

**SAY:** “As we study, consider how God can use a trial in your life to help you trust Him and grow in your faith.”

## STUDY THE BIBLE

## James 1:1-2



10 minutes

**GUIDE:** Note that the group will be in the Book of James for the entire study.

**READ:** Call on a group member to read James 1:1-2.

**SAY:** “Look again at verse 2. Joy and trials really don’t seem to go together. Let’s examine some trials that come our way.”

**GUIDE:** Lead the group to look at the trials the author notes on **page 10** of the **PSG (Temptation, Sickness, Persecution, Trouble)**. Tell them to scan what the author says about each one. Then call for testimonies of trials related to sickness and trouble.

**DISCUSS:** **Question #2 (PSG, p. 12): “What keeps you from reacting joyfully when the pressure of life seems overwhelming?”**

**James 1:1-2**

**1** James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ: To the 12 tribes in the Dispersion. Greetings.

**2** Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials,

**KEY WORDS:** **Slave** (v. 1)—This humble title signifies ownership by, absolute obligation to, and readiness to obey a master.

**Trials** (v. 2)—“Trials” are difficulties and afflictions that can strengthen our faith and prove its genuineness as in 1 Peter 1:6-7.

**James** was one of Jesus’ biological brothers (Matt. 13:55; Gal. 1:19), though he did not believe in Jesus during His earthly ministry (John 7:3-5). After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to James (1 Cor. 15:7), then he believed. Later James wrote the letter we are studying. By the time of the council described in Acts 15, James seems to have been the recognized leader of the Jerusalem church (see 15:13-21). He was known as “James the Just” due to his reputation for piety, purity, and steadfastness in obedience to God. He died as a martyr in A.D. 62.

James began his letter by identifying himself as a **slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ**. What a personal testimony! James had gone from saying, “Jesus is merely the brother I grew up with in Nazareth,” to saying, “He is **the Lord Jesus Christ** and I am his willing slave.” Jesus’ resurrection spoke powerfully to James!

Jesus’ resurrection speaks powerfully to us also, even when we are under the pressure of trials. Jesus, the Sufferer, endured the trial of the cross knowing God was working out great purposes and would vindicate Him in the resurrection. For the joy set before Him Jesus endured the cross (Heb. 12:2). His resurrection shines light on the path through trials and shows where it leads!

James wrote to the 12 **tribes** dispersed or scattered abroad. These were Jewish believers who gathered in house churches in cities and towns throughout the first-century world. James probably called them the 12 tribes to signify they were the renewed Israel enjoying and expecting fulfillment of God’s promises in Christ.



James and these believers knew about **trials**. As with every generation since, first-century believers faced many hardships.

**Trials** translates a Greek word that, depending on its context, can refer either to hardships that test us or to inner urges and enticements to sin. In James 1:13, the verb form of the word refers to enticement to sin. In James 1:2 the word refers to hardships that test us.

What trials pressured James and his fellow believers? Many had probably lived through the early persecution of the church in Jerusalem and beyond (see Acts 6:8–8:4; 9:1–2). Many knew first hand about humble circumstances socially and financially (Jas. 1:9). Some experienced oppression and mistreatment in the courts by powerful people (2:6). They were familiar with sickness (5:14) and any number of other afflictions. Years after he wrote his letter, James himself was to endure faithfully the trial of martyrdom.

James instructed his fellow believers to **consider it** a great **joy** when they went through various trials. James gave a command at this point. He did more than suggest **joy**—he commanded it!

God wants and commands us to choose joyful attitudes when we go through trials. This may seem inconceivable to some of us. Is it even possible to be honest about the difficulty of a great trial yet have great joy at the same time?

Paul was in prison and yet rejoiced (Phil. 1:14–18; 2:17–18). He rejoiced in his sufferings (Col. 1:24). He said we are to rejoice always (1 Thess. 5:16). The young believers in Thessalonica received the gospel with joy even though they suffered severely for doing so (1:6). Peter said we are to keep on rejoicing as we share the sufferings of Christ (1 Pet. 4:13).

My wife and I are friends with a Christian couple from Africa. Their college-age believing son died several years ago. Their grief was and is real and painful. Yet they speak with honest and deep joy of God's sufficiency in sustaining them through their trial. Their joy is deeply rooted in the gospel promises of resurrection and final glory and in the profound personal experience of being upheld by God Himself as they have trusted in Him.

## Notes

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**DO:** Tell the group to look again at the first phrase in verse 2: *Consider it a great joy.*

**SAY:** "When we encounter things that are difficult to deal with, the Bible says 'Consider it a great joy.' This is a command, not a suggestion. Joy may not be our first reaction, but it is God's desired outcome for us."

**DISCUSS: Question #3**  
(PSG, p. 12): "What emotions did you feel during your most recent trial?"

**GUIDE:** Stress that joy in a trial comes as we make a careful and deliberate decision. Help the group grasp that the concept in the word *consider* is that of evaluating, and then leading your mind, attitude, and actions based on the evaluation.

**TRANSITION:** "Verse 3 gives more insight on how to accomplish what may often seem to be an impossible task."

## STUDY THE BIBLE

## James 1:3



10 minutes

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read James 1:3.

**SAY:** “Another way to ‘consider it a great joy’ when we experience a trial is to know what God will do for us as a result of the trial.”

**GUIDE:** Lead group members to focus on the phrase *testing of your faith* in verse 3. Help the group understand that whatever the God-given test may be, it is, as the author says, **“a test of your faith in the strength and wisdom of God to see you through”** (PSG, p. 13, second paragraph).

**DO:** Bring an object that takes some effort to lift with one hand. (Examples: *a large can of food, a bag of sugar or flour, an exercise weight, etc.*) Pass the item around the group. Invite volunteers to see how many times they can lift the item.

## James 1:3

3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

We have a definite reason for joy in our trials: the **testing of your faith** produces **endurance**. The hardships we all face are not meaningless! They evaluate our faith.

The testing process purifies and strengthens its object. Metal workers use fiery furnaces to refine and shape metal. The goal is for the metal to meet the required standard of purity and strength for its intended use. If it could speak, maybe the metal would say, “I would rather be comfortable than in that furnace over there! Mr. Metal Worker, let me lie here undisturbed, if you don’t mind.” But without the furnace the metal will be neither strong nor proven. It will be unfit for use.

Our **faith** is the metal undergoing the testing process when we face trials. Faith is trust in God. It is confidence in and dependence upon Him. In part, the wisdom He gives (Jas. 1:5) is wisdom to trust and yield to His loving heart, knowing that He uses every difficulty to refine His people based on His goal for them (Rom. 8:28-30).

We already trust that His Word is true and depend upon Him. If we did not, we would not be Christians at all. Yet, our trust can be purer and deeper, less contaminated by pockets of self-reliance and self-will.

In 2 Corinthians 1:8-10, Paul described a great trial he experienced and what he learned in it. He did not name the trial explicitly as persecution or threats or some critical illness that nearly took his life. It may have been any of these things or something else. Whatever the trial was, it was severe. Paul wrote that he was under great pressure, overwhelmed beyond what he could endure in his own strength. He felt the sentence of death as he went through the trial. Paul then explained that the trial came upon him so that he would not depend upon himself, but upon God who even raises the dead.

Remember that Paul was an apostle, a man of faith who preached and taught about faith. Still, God took Paul through a terribly difficult trial so he could learn more fully and experientially to depend upon God’s strength and power rather than his own.

My friends from Africa whose college-age son died a few years ago have experienced something that seems to me

similar to Paul's trial. In the furnace of emotional pain they learned more deeply than ever before to lean upon God who is with them, who upholds them (see Isa. 41:9-10) and who promises that victory, not death, will be the final word for their son (see 1 Cor. 15:54). Their faith is more purely and deeply than ever in the God who sustains them by His love and strength.

We have been speaking of faith as trust in God. We need to add that it is *active* trust in God. Faith expresses itself actively in deeds of obedience (see Jas. 2:18-26). Trials supply difficult opportunities to obey. Without such difficulties our faith would be soft and weak. With them, we are strengthened for further obedience.

Peter and John experienced this in Jerusalem soon after Jesus' resurrection. They spent a night in jail because they preached Christ (Acts 4:3). The next day they stood firmly for Christ even when pressured by threats not to preach Christ any more (vv. 17-22). This was all part of the "testing" process. When Peter and John returned to their friends, they all joined together in prayer (vv. 23-31). They prayed in faith for the boldness they needed to continue preaching. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and went right on preaching the Word. Of course, more persecution followed, but the "testing" of jail and threats had pressed Peter and John into deeper dependence upon God and prepared them for the obedience of faith in future difficulties.

This brings us to the matter of the **endurance** the testing of faith produces. Endurance is a necessity of true Christian faith. If we are true believers, we endure to the end (Matt. 24:13). We do not believe for a while, then stop; trust for a while, then turn away; obey for a while, then go our own easier way.

The very word **endurance** makes us think long-term. We know we do not go through a single trial or a couple of trials then declare, "OK, I have made it." Our next verse points us to the great goal at the end of a long process.

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**SAY:** "We all know that physical exercise is good for us. The more we exercise, the more exercise we can do."

**DO:** Look again at verse 3, and note the word *endurance*. Stress that, just as the purpose of physical exercise is to build our physical strength and endurance, so God's purpose in a trial is to build our spiritual strength and endurance.

**GUIDE:** Direct learners to scan the last paragraph of this section (**PSG, p. 14**) that lists four statements we can rely on when we are in the midst of a trial. Invite volunteers to read each of the statements.

**"1. You are a child of God, and you have faith that can be tested.**

**2. You have a faith worth developing and refining.**

**3. God has a plan to strengthen you, prepare you, and ultimately to welcome you.**

**4. You have the assurance of the presence of God, because when he refines you, he never abandons you."**

**DISCUSS:** Question #4  
(PSG, p. 14): “During your most recent trial, how did you see God walking with you?”

**SUMMARIZE:** Read verse 3, and comment that God wants our faith in Him to be stronger, so He sends or allows trials (testing) to be a part of our spiritual growth. How we deal with those trials is an indication of how mature or immature we are in our faith.

**TRANSITION:** “But lest we think endurance is a one-and-done proposition, James goes on to let us know that developing endurance is an ongoing process.”

## STUDY THE BIBLE

### James 1:4



10 minutes

**GUIDE:** Lead the group to remember what their parents taught them about finishing a job, and what Mom or Dad would have said about a job that was half done.

## James 1:4

4 But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

God intends for **endurance** to do its complete work in us. It has an end goal to reach and getting there may take a long time. Sometimes we feel fatigue because trials keep coming like ocean waves. The testing continues because it must do its complete work.

I have two sons who are NCAA® athletes. The conditioning work they go through individually and with their teams is intense and challenging. The “testing” process builds endurance. One day may seem to be the hardest ever, only to be replaced by a new hardest ever before long. The result—they are stronger, faster, and tougher than they were a year ago. In the coming year, Lord willing, they will progress further. It is a long process.

My athlete sons do their best training when they are with their teams. They train harder and progress further when they work alongside their teammates.

In writing and sending his letter, James was one believer coming alongside others to encourage them to continue steadfastly in faith for the long haul. After receiving James’s letter, the believers surely read it aloud during their gatherings. In fact, they probably did so over and over in gathering after gathering. Then they probably talked about the trials testing them and encouraged one another to endure.

God intends something very similar for us. God gives us help through one another. Christians are to encourage one another. When we meet together for Bible study, prayer, or fellowship, we can talk about our trials and give encouragement.

God often gives wisdom (Jas. 1:5-8) through fellow believers. His wisdom includes insight and understanding that equip us to think and act rightly in our trials. By His wisdom we discern whether to wait or act, whether to be silent or speak, and what to say when it is time to speak. Many times it is in talking with one another that we come to see practically how to endure faithfully in trials.

We can also help one another stay focused upon the goal of our trials. According to James, the culmination or



end goal of the endurance process is for the believer to be **mature and complete**. What type of maturity or perfection is in view here? Is it maturity in faith we are able to realize in this life? Or, is it perfection that will only come beyond the present age?

**Mature** translates *teleios*. James used *teleios* elsewhere of God's good and perfect gift (Jas. 1:17), the perfect law of liberty (v. 25), and the perfection of not stumbling at all in what a person says (3:2). In each case, absolute rather than partial perfection was James's meaning. Thus, in the second portion of James 1:4, James probably intended to lift his readers' eyes toward the full maturity of our Christian faith that is God's ultimate goal for us.

Therefore, in James 1:2-4 earthly progress toward maturity and final perfection are set before us as one great process with a definite completion. Steadily, progressively, God works to refine us through the testing in this life. Finally, fully, He will bring the work to a glorious end.

James 1:9-12 teaches us to endure present trials with a view toward the final state awaiting us. If we are impoverished now, we can rejoice we are really exalted with Christ Jesus (1:9) and awaiting the disclosure of our high position when God gives us the "crown of life" in the end (v. 12).

By faith we press toward the goal. God finally will complete His work in us when Christ comes and transforms us into the likeness of His own glorious body (see Phil. 1:6; 3:14-21).

Unless the Lord comes (Jas. 5:8) before we pass away from this earth, death will be the final trial we must endure. James endured trials for three decades as a believer in Jesus. Then, in A.D. 62, he faced the final trial of martyrdom. Though the details of his death are not completely clear, the tradition is that the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem pressured James to deny Jesus publicly. They sent him to the pinnacle of the temple to make his denial, hoping to curb the rising tide of faith in Christ in the city. James seized the moment and confessed boldly that Jesus was exalted at God's right hand and would come again in power and great glory.

The infuriated Jewish leaders cast James down from the pinnacle of the temple. When the fall did not kill James, they stoned him. As he neared his last breath, he prayed for the forgiveness of his killers, just as Jesus had prayed from the cross. Imagine the impression James's confession of Jesus and love toward his enemies must have made on the people who saw James die!

What effect can your joy and faithfulness through trials have on people who witness your response?

**SAY:** "God is not in the business of doing things half way. As the Scripture says, 'He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus' (Phil. 1:6). James hits that point right on the head in verse 4."

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read James 1:4.

**GUIDE:** Stress the phrase *endurance must do its complete work*. Help the group understand that the result of submitting to this work in our lives is that the believer will be "mature and complete, lacking nothing."

**DO:** Focus on the terms *mature, complete, and lacking nothing*. Direct attention to the definitions of these terms on **page 16** of the **PSG**:

**"Mature: Having reached its end, complete, fully developed.**

**Complete: Fully developed, running at full capacity with nothing unused.**

**Lacking nothing: Nothing left out or left behind—nothing inferior. You are fully equipped and prepared."**

**GUIDE:** Help the group consider what allowing endurance to do its work looks like in senior adulthood. Talk about how senior Christians can continue to allow God to make them open, pliable, humble, and teachable even if they have been believers for decades.

**DISCUSS: Question #5**  
(PSG, p. 16): “How have you been encouraged by the endurance of others during trials?”

**DO:** Call on volunteers to tell how they responded to the three statements in the activity “Here Comes the Trial” (PSG, p. 17).

**SUMMARIZE:** Note that believers in their senior years often can become weary with wondering how much more work God needs to do in them before they are complete in the faith. Stress that in Christ, we can endure with patience knowing that He is performing His good work in us in His time and in His way.

Like Jesus, for the joy set before him, James endured his own death (Heb. 12:1-2). The fall and the stones caused pain, deep pain, no doubt. But I suppose James suffered the death-inflicting blows with joy that was real and profound as he trusted the God who was perfecting him and would give him the crown of life!

Within the last year, a female college student who attends our church has turned to Christ as her Savior and Lord. Last Sunday, she was baptized!

Her baptism decision was hard. She studied Scripture carefully before concluding that, as a believer in Christ, she was called and commanded to be baptized. One reason she studied and deliberated so carefully is that she anticipated her parents’ response to her baptism. She grew up in a different religious tradition. She loves her parents dearly, but is turning from the family’s tradition. As she expected, her parents protested. They told her she would either change her mind about baptism or baptism would change her relationship with them. Her heart was set.

Her relationship with her parents has been strained for weeks. She now waits to see if all communication ends, and for how long. Do you feel badly for this young woman as she goes through this trial? Would you erase the difficulty for her, if you could?

Like this college student, some of your class members may be at the start of their faith journey. Others may be in mid-course or nearing the end. What would be lost if they were to live from now on trial-free?

Are you going through a trial currently? Does one lie just ahead? How might God use it to help you trust Him and grow strong in the obedience of faith?

*NOTES*

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## BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR



The garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives where Jesus prayed, "Father, not what I want, but what You will."

The following excerpt is from the *Biblical Illustrator* article, "Testing" (Spring 1998), which relates to this lesson and can be found on the Fall 2013 *Biblical Illustrator Plus* (CD-ROM).

"The classic biblical example of God's testing His people came in that moment when God sent

Abraham to the mountain to offer his only son as a sacrifice. The idea of God's testing His people to discern the depth of our devotion is one of the most consistent communications throughout Scripture. We have only to look at Jesus' example to learn how central it is. Just as soon as Jesus left the pain of Gethsemane where He prayed, "Father, not what I want; but what You will," He was led into the greatest test of His entire pilgrimage on this earth. God does indeed test us to determine our devotion to doing His will."

**Another previous article,** "Patience in James" (Summer, 2003), also relates to this lesson and can be found on the Fall 2013 *Biblical Illustrator Plus* (CD-ROM).

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## SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

*Trusting the hand of God in the midst of trials begins with trusting Him for our greatest need: salvation.*

Be sensitive to those in your group who may not know Christ as Savior and Lord. Each week, make yourself available before or after the session to speak privately with anyone who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they lead others to Christ.

### Want more?

Additional teaching tips, leader articles, and session enhancements for specific groups (women, men) are available on our website:

***BibleStudiesforLife.com/blog.***

## LIVE IT OUT



5 minutes

**DO:** Stress **The Point:** “Joyful trust in God will get you through any trial.”

**GUIDE:** Call attention to the question under **Live It Out:** “What does God want you to do when trials come your way?” (PSG, p. 18; see text at right). Invite the group to pause and choose one of the numbered statements that speaks most to a need in their lives.

## Wrap It Up

**SAY:** “Let’s commit in Christ’s strength to allowing endurance to do its complete work in our lives. Instead of bitterness or despair, let’s choose joyful trust that God will get us through any trial.”

**PRAY:** Lead in a prayer of thanks to God for being a loving Father who is always present to enable us to face our trials with joyful trust in Him.

## Live It Out

What does God want you to do when trials come your way?

**1. God wants you to choose a joyful attitude (v. 2).** Identify at least one trial that regularly sours your life. Consider how a joyful attitude could help you deal with that trial in a more positive way.

**2. God wants you to trust His loving heart (v. 3).** What trial has God helped you endure? Consider talking with someone who is going through a similar trial. With godly sensitivity and wisdom, help that person understand how God helped you endure.

**3. God wants you to yield a surrendered spirit (v. 4).** You may have been enduring a particular trial for a long time, perhaps years. Enduring with joy is impossible in your own strength. Pray for God’s enduring strength in Christ to surrender daily to what God wants to complete in your life.

God doesn’t want to leave you incomplete. He continues working in you, even in your latter years, in every circumstance, both good and bad, to develop His character and power in you so that you may be mature and complete. The Lord wants you to be useful for His glory in your family, your church, and among those you relate to in your community on a regular basis. When you surrender your will to God’s sovereign plan—even if you don’t understand all the reasons why—the result can be amazing.

A lot of people stereotype senior adults as being sour on life. ***Go make some lemonade, and help turn that stereotype on its head.***





### ***My Thoughts***

### ***My Group's Prayer Requests***

## Facing the Storm



Suddenly, our life took a frightening turn. I watched in horror as John slipped on black ice and fell on his back. He cried out in agony as I struggled to help him up. Disoriented and moaning, we staggered into the garage where he fell a second time, banging his head on the cement floor.

I screamed for help, but no one answered. When John awoke, I was kneeling over him, whispering, "Please don't die."



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