

Bible Ministry

by Nigel Lee

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having the mind of Christ and living with humility and lowliness of mind, and encourages listeners to draw on God's strength and comfort to overcome depression and live a life of service to others.

Duration: 44:22

Scripture: Philippians 2:1

Topics: "Ministry", "Unity in Christ", "Overcoming Depression"

Description

Nigel Lee emphasizes the importance of unity and the mind of Christ in the context of world missions, addressing a gathering of 600 Bible college students. He draws from Philippians 2, urging attendees to adopt a mindset of humility and service, reflecting on the challenges of Christian leadership and the need for mutual support among believers. Lee highlights the significance of remembering God's faithfulness and the necessity of honest communication with God, especially during times of personal struggle and depression. He encourages the students to draw strength from Scripture and to maintain hope in their ministry efforts. The sermon concludes with a call to serve one another and to trust in God's guidance.

Transcript

It was tremendous actually to see about 600 students from Bible colleges all over Europe meeting here in this hall and I believe God spoke very clearly about getting involved in world missions with them. Now our pattern will be the same day by day, we'll have half an hour of worship and a devotional message. Thursday and Friday Dr David Carling from Britain will be speaking here and then we continue from 9 to 9.30 in a time of prayer.

This morning Peter Maiden will be leading us in prayer, particularly for field leaders and those responsible for the guidance and the direction of the work. He'll come when I've finished. And then at 9.30 we divide into two groups.

Those who have been on OM in leadership, in responsibility for at least a year, a full complete year, please go up to room 2D, I hope there's enough room up there. Those that are not in that category who have perhaps just begun to join the fellowship, who've not been in leadership for that length of time, please stay here and George Verwer will be speaking here this morning. I hope his voice is sufficient.

It may be an uncharacteristically quiet George. He said he can still wave his arms around but he's had an operation on his voice from talking, at least when he starts. If any of you are in doubt as to what you choose to go to at 11 o'clock, please pick up, if you haven't got it already, the outline list that gives a complete account of all 18 or 19 that we've got on in these next few days, and you choose.

There are six to choose from at 11 o'clock today, for instance. One of them carries on over till tomorrow. Thursdays and Fridays seminars are all two-day seminars.

So you pick on Thursday and then you stick with what you've chosen. Now can you turn with me please to one of the old OM chapters. I wonder how long ago it was that you read.

If we tested you, how many of you would be able to name the chapters that were actually all... Philippians chapter 2. Philippians 2. We're not going to have a great, long, mind-bending message, but I do want to share a few things from my own heart and experience. Philippians 2, beginning at the first verse. By the way, this conference is entirely English only.

It always has been. If you have difficulties with my English or anyone else's, we can work out private whispered translation if need be up in the minstrels' gallery or in some corner of the room. I hope you're able to understand Philippians 2. If there is therefore any comfort in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassions, fulfill ye my joy that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

Do nothing through faction or through vain glory, but in lowliness of mind, each counting other better than himself. Not looking, each of you, to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others. Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross.

Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputings, that you may be blameless and harmless children of God, and so on.

Philippians is a unique epistle in this sense, that it does not seem to deal with any major doctrinal controversy. The Philippians are doctrinally orthodox, nor does it deal with problems of laziness or inadequacy in Christian work. They see most of them to be... So they can sign the doctrinal basis of belief, they're all somehow involved in evangelism.

Why then does Paul bother to write to them? Because they don't like each other. It's a very interesting situation, not uncommon in keen, enthusiastic Christian churches, groups, doctrinally sound, engaged in the work of the Lord, but actually they don't like each other very much. And Paul is writing in the epistle about the way we think as Christian workers.

It's very often true that Christian work brings out the worst in the Christian worker. And so you get this emphasis on the mind. Do you get the point of what Paul is saying? Verses 3, verse 4, verse 5, in lowliness of mind.

Have this mind in you which was in Christ. Be of the same mind, of one accord, of one mind. You might begin to get the sense that Paul was trying to talk to you about the way you think.

I had a bad day yesterday. I had one of those days that come occasionally when things... Actually I've noticed a pattern. In all my evangelistic work back in Britain, so often before I go out perhaps to preach the gospel, something will go wrong at home, or in the church, or in my own life.

It seems to happen uncannily. And I'm going to have to humble myself, I'm going to have to say sorry, I'm going to blunder into problems, and again the gospel is going to be brought back afresh. The gospel of forgiveness.

The gospel of forgiving other people. It happens again and again and again. God will so arrange circumstances that the very core of his grace and his gospel will have to come afresh to me all over again before I go out and preach it to others.

God seems to arrange circumstances that way. God wants to bring us again and again back to the very core central things that we believe. And I think it's good for us to be brought back to this particular chapter and the emphasis here at the start of our conference together.

Paul has talked in chapter one about the joy that he has in thinking about the Philippians and their evangelistic work. But he says now you fulfill my joy by learning how to think properly. To have the same mind, the mind of Christ.

He starts off with a fourfold motivation. Is there any comfort in Christ for you? Is there any, literally in the Greek, any coming alongside of you by Christ to strengthen you? Yes there is. Is there any consolation in love? Are you at all melted and moved by love? Does your heart ever get warmed up by love? Is God's loving character coming out in you? Yes.

Any fellowship of the Spirit, God the Holy Spirit will draw us together into likeness to Christ. Is that happening says Paul? Any tender mercies and compassions? Then you fulfill my joy, top it up by having this kind of mind. Verses five down to eleven are a piece of superb poetry, Greek poetry by Paul.

And he points out three things about Christ. It's interesting Paul's tactics isn't it? Instead of saying in the first chapter, now I have a particular message here for Euodia and Syntyche who are quarrelling. I want them hauled up before the elders.

I want them to be publicly rebuked. I want them to be made to feel how wicked they have been behaving. Paul doesn't do that at all.

He slips it in in one verse right at the end. He concentrates, these are his tactics, on making people see Christ. Brian Russell Jones on Sunday, talking from here at the worship meeting that we had during the fellowship weekend.

On three words, behold your God. That too is Paul's tactic. Look at this that's said of Christ.

Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus. Three things. Christ made a decision in the presence of God.

He counted, he valued it not only in the presence of God, not something to be hung on to, to retain majesty, status, importance, dignity, position, privilege, everything that we expect other people to give us. He chose with an act of the will in the presence of God his Father to lay aside all that. And then secondly, he lived with the lonely consequences of that choice.

We are as leaders, so called, to be asked to make certain decisions about the way we will live. With what courtesy and grace we will treat others. How we will serve other people.

We make that decision before God. That decision is then tested day after day after day in the coming years. Christ then had to live with the lonely, often lonely, consequences of the decision that he'd made.

Verses seven to eight. He emptied himself. He took the form of a servant.

He was not any the less God. But he laid aside the majesty, the aura, the power, the privilege of being God. And when he was mocked, when he was buffeted, when he was misunderstood, when he wept over Jerusalem, when he was crowned with thorns, God Almighty, inside a crown of thorns, he was called twelve legion of angels.

Christ could have slayed his accusers, those who misunderstood him, those who mistreated him, slayed them with a single word. But he lived with the results of that choice to go God's way. He became obedient.

Under death, even the death of the cross, that death which is especially reserved for the foreigner, the despised, the slave, the underprivileged, the people whom both the Greek and the Roman and the Jewish world regarded as scum and garbage. And then verse nine, the third thing, is that God himself takes care of the outcome. Matthew 20, verse 27, says, if you want to be first, you become the servant.

Psychologically that's brilliant. He doesn't say, if you want to be first, what a wicked thing, how dare you ever want to be first. How dare you want to lead, what an awful motive to have detected in your heart that you want to lead, you want to be important, you want to be first.

No, says God, that's fine, that's natural, that's there. God perhaps has put that in your heart. Many people want to leave a mark, to do something that stands, not to waste their lives.

If you want to be first, then this, become the servant. Anybody you see, try to serve them. And God himself takes care of the outcome of this process of living with the decision to go his way that you've made in his presence.

God highly exalted him, super exalted him, it literally says, in the original. There are many problems that crop up at conferences. They're interesting, um, for this reason, that they reveal the way we think.

They show what's going on in our heart, attitude towards it. You know, you can take away a person's, briefly, yesterday evening, on Numbers, chapter twelve, verse one, you remember how, um, Moses was criticized because of his family. Miriam and Aaron saw something in Moses' family, and they started to put the word around it.

I don't know how many families we've got here, I think it's over fifty. I can tell you, life gets pretty heavy. Twenty percent of the conference is made up of, of children.

When the children do all kinds of things at the top of trees, at the bottom of swimming pools, rampaging around the building at night, and, you know, you can see, and you think, uh-uh, I recognize that face. I know the leader who's responsible for that kid. Yeah, typical.

Yeah, he treats me the same, hmm. We can so often get discouraged, too, at a conference. Secretly, you know, we sing in the meetings, we do our washing up with a straight face, but actually, in heart, we, we're overwhelmed with a sense of weakness and failure.

What, what do we do in such circumstances, when our mind is beginning to throw up things that, when we face them, we're ashamed of? Here the Lord has given us a picture of the mind of Christ. And I know that I'm not like it. What do I do? In thirty seconds, Romans, chapter fifteen, verse four, go back to Scripture, whatever things are written for time were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures, we might have hope.

Do you have hope about your circumstances, your future, your work, your ministry? Through reading the Scriptures, we are to be given hope, says Paul. And go on to the next verse, now the God of patience and comfort grants you to be of the same mind. God is a God of tremendous patience.

In 2 Corinthians, chapter one, verse three, we read of him as the God of all comfort. We're to have minds that are growing to be like Christ. Through a process of choosing, living with those consequences, drawing on God's strength, drawing from the Scriptures, I appeal to you, in the rush and the busyness of OM conference life, make sure that day by day you are drawing on God.

It's a strange thing. We can be in a movement that believes in the distribution of Scripture to the ends of the earth, and the longer we stay in the movement, the more bored we become with Scripture ourselves. We can be in a movement that's committed to the daily preaching of God's word, and yet we can come to the end of the day and we've got nothing.

Please take that right at the start, that stand in your own heart before the Lord, that you're going to draw on that Scripture that's been written for your comfort and that you might have hope. Lean on the God of patience, draw from the God of comfort, and let's remember that the work is God, and it is his work to make our minds like his own. I was pondering yesterday that phrase in Scripture where it speaks of the day of Christ.

Sometimes we imagine that we're going to be brought to the judgment seat of Christ, and I believe in one sense that's true, but I believe there's another sense in which it is Christ's own work that is going to be evaluated that day. His work in you, and that work that God has started to make you think like himself, to give you the strength to live with the consequences of those decisions that you've made to walk the way of the cross. God's work will one day be evaluated in you by God himself.

It's a great thing to look forward to. Let us pray. Our Father, thank you for your grace.

Thank you for that grace that has touched each of us with our dryness and our hopelessness and hope with today and the battles that we face. Thank you that everything that has been achieved this past summer has been through your grace. Thank you for the victories that we've seen on the roads and in the teams and financially, in relationships.

It's all of your grace. Lord, if you took your spirit from us if we were not Christians, this place would fall apart. And you've been gracious, and you've been leading us.

Lord, we want at the start to commit ourselves to serve one another, to think of ourselves not with faction or vain glory, but to look to the interests of each other, to trust our futures into your hands, that as we humble ourselves and serve you might take care over the question of whether we're ever to be exalted or not. And Lord, at the end of the road we want to bow our knee and raise our tongue and say that Jesus Christ is our Lord and we love him. Move amongst us in these days, O God.

Thank you for that sense of being back where we belong, as we sing and worship together at the beginning of these meetings. Thank you for the gift that you've given to Terry and others to lead us in worship. Lord, may these days together, as we ponder scripture and relate to one another, be days of being drawn closer to our great God and Saviour, who saves our minds as well as our souls.

Grant it be so, in Jesus' name. Can you turn please to the 42nd Psalm? It's good to have a word of encouragement at the beginning of the day, so I thought I'd speak to you on the subject of depression for 25 minutes. Psalm 42.

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. Where can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, where is your God? These things I remember as I pour out my soul, how I used to go with the multitude leading the procession to the house of God with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Saviour and my God. My soul is downcast within me, therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon, from Mount Mizar, deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls. All your waves and breakers have swept over me.

By day the Lord directs His love, at night His song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life. I say to God, my rock, why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning oppressed by the enemy? My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, where is your God? Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Saviour and my God. We're not really sure who the author of this psalm is, but it's all obviously someone who is suffering a very deep depression indeed.

He speaks in verse 3 of crying day and night. My tears have been my food day and night. Here is a man who has slipped into a really deep depression.

It's very interesting to look into the Bible and to see the people in the scriptures who really struggled with depression. You might think it's people who slip away from God and who live at a distance from Him, who are those who have to grapple with depression. But in fact a careful study of scripture will prove that that is by no means always the case.

Think with me for a moment of three people who struggled with really deep depression. First of all let me remind you of Moses. Here he is struggling with his own problems, but much more than that the problems of the great army of the children of Israel.

And he gets so low that on one occasion he cries out, I am no longer able to bear all these people alone. Kill me. In other words he's crying out to God, take my life from me.

Let me no longer see my wretchedness. And of course you're all familiar with Elijah. There in 1 Kings 18 and 19.

In chapter 18 he has that incredible victory for God on the summit of Mount Carmel. As alone he stands against 950 prophets and he sees the victory of God. But then in chapter 19 right after this moment of victory he's found in the very depths of depression and he cries out the following words, O Lord take away my life because I am no better than my father's.

And here's Jonah. He must have been really low when he was moved to pray in Jonah chapter 4. O Lord I beseech you, take away my life for it's better for me to die than it is for me to live. Three men of God.

Three men who were used by God in an incredible way and yet three men who had to struggle with really deep depression. And here in the 42nd Psalm we have a fourth man. This man, we don't know his name, but he was one of the instrumentalists possibly in the temple worship.

And the great joy of his life in Israel was to lead the worshippers to the house of God and to lead them in their worship of God. And here he is in exile. He's far away from the land of Israel.

He can no longer lead the praise of God's people. He can no longer go to the temple and he has sunk into depression. And yet I want you to notice five things if you've got time this morning.

Because this man did not just allow the cloud of depression to come down and engulf him entirely. But here was a man who struggled against depression and by the end of the psalm you can see tremendous victory. And I want to try and show you five very simple secrets of this man's victory over depression.

First of all, notice that throughout the psalm he remembered that he had a God and a Saviour to turn to. He never loses that in the psalm. So you see in verse five he speaks of my Saviour and my God.

He uses the same words exactly in verse eleven. And in verse nine he speaks of God my rock. Often when you're counting the non-Christian, that awful phrase, that phrase of absolute destitution comes through.

When the non-Christian says to you, you know I just don't have anyone to turn to. I suppose there's no phrase which moves me more than that. Absolute loneliness.

Absolute destitution in the world. And yet that's just not true for the Christian. Here is the psalmist at the very depths and yet still he can speak of my God, my rock, my Saviour.

And you can see that, can't you, so clearly in the experience of Job. Here's this man who's stripped of everything. Business, family, health, everything is gone.

And his so-called friends come around and they said to him much the same as the people were saying to the psalmist here at the end of verse three. Where is your God? That's what they were saying to Job. You've been preaching to us.

You've been telling us about a living God. Well where is your God? Job has lost everything. But I'm sure you'll never forget his words.

Though he slay me, yet will I trust him. And I trust that's something which will always be your experience. Many of us are going to have times of difficulty and depression this month, certainly this year.

But never allow the devil to tempt you in such a way that you feel the destitution and the loneliness of the non-Christian. We always have a rock. We always have a Saviour.

We always have my God whom we can turn to. And then the second little secret of the psalmist was he remembered to look back. He remembered to look back and recall the joy of his previous spiritual experiences.

Look at verse four. These things I remember as I pour out my soul. How I used to go with the multitude and so on.

And looking back is biblically very, very important. And it can be a great blessing in times of difficulty and depression. Of course there's one sense in which as Christians we should not look back.

We should be like Paul, forgetting what lies behind. We should be straining forward to what lies ahead. There's another sense in which it's very, very important to regularly look back in your Christian life.

In 2 Peter chapter one and verse nine, Peter speaks of those who had forgotten that they'd been cleansed from their former sins. It's a very interesting phrase, isn't it? People who had forgotten that they'd been cleansed from their sins. They were going through times of difficulty possibly and they forgot all that God had done for them.

They forgot even that God had dealt with their sins. And it is amazing, isn't it, how fickle, how uncertain the mind of man is. Particularly at times of difficulty.

One day of difficulty and we can forget twenty, thirty years of God's faithfulness and goodness. I'm constantly surprised in one sense by the children of Israel and yet looking at my own life it takes away the surprise. Here's the children of Israel constantly experiencing the goodness of God and yet constantly forgetting and turning their backs on the God who'd been so good to them.

If you want to see the record of that, you have it in the ninth chapter of Nehemiah. It's a catalogue of God's goodness to Israel and Israel's forgetfulness of the God who had been so good. And you read in verse seventeen of Nehemiah chapter nine, they failed to remember the miracles which God performed amongst them.

They'd seen the Red Sea parted, they'd followed the pillar of fire at night and the cloud through the day. They had been crying out for water, they'd seen the rocks struck and water flow. They had been dying and they'd seen the bronze serpent raised in the wilderness and life again was theirs.

They'd seen it all. It had been their personal experience but they failed to remember the miracles which God performed. The communion service is an amazing service isn't it? Isn't it incredible that we should require bread and wine to remind us of Calvary? Can you imagine that the human race would ever forget that? Can you imagine that Christians would ever forget that? That God himself should become a man and allow the very people he had created to nail him to a cross? Could you ever forget? And yet the Lord Jesus knew how fickle the mind of man is and instituted a supper so that we might remember his goodness towards us.

And it's so important when you feel yourself slipping down the slope of depression to stop and quite deliberately look back and remember the faithfulness, remember the mercy of your God. And then the third simple secret. This man challenged this cloud of despair.

As I've said he didn't just sit back and allow the cloud to engulf him. Look at him challenging in verse 5. Challenging his own soul. Why are you downcast oh my soul? Why are you so disturbed within me? Why don't you put your hope in God? Challenging his despair.

Now the British will tell you that talking to yourself is the first sign of madness. But that's not true for the Christian. It's biblically again very important to learn to talk to yourself.

To learn to talk to your soul. So if you see me going around the conference center and my lips are moving and there's nobody beside me, don't take me along to the hospital room. It's not really that serious.

Biblically it's very important to talk to yourself. To remind yourself that you've just seen of the mercy of God, of his grace and his goodness towards us. And this is the method the Psalmist used on this occasion.

To challenge his despair. Fourthly, notice how eventually he adopted God's perspective of his situation. He began to look at his situation through the eyes of God.

Look at verse 7. He speaks of God's waves. God's breakers sweeping over him. Now what are these waves? What are these breakers? Well they're the very problems that he's battling with.

But he begins to recognize that God is in his problems. God may have a purpose through the problems that he is in the process of struggling with. Remember Joseph looking back on the evil actions of his brothers in the 50th chapter of Genesis.

This is what he says in the 20th verse. You, you brothers, you intended to harm me. But God was there.

God was in it. He intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done. The saving of many lives.

You can see Paul recognizing similar circumstances in Philippians chapter 1. There he is languishing in his prison cell. And I think people from Philippi have written to him and said, Paul, your imprisonment is a problem to us. Here you are, the apostle to the Gentiles.

God has called you and gifted you. And there you are languishing in a prison cell. What is God doing? How do you understand it? And Paul takes his pen and writes the following to them.

I want you to know brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. The palace guard know that I am in chains for Christ. Most of the brothers from the church who visit me, the church in Rome, they are encouraged through my imprisonment and they are speaking the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

So Paul is not sitting in the prison cell thinking, poor me. What is God doing? Gifting me, calling me and then leaving me here. No, he looks through the eyes of God at the situation.

He sees God is there. God is doing something in the difficulties. And that's another great key to handling these depressions which come to us.

Look at the circumstances which are causing those depressions. Is God in it? Is he trying to do something in our lives? To do something through our lives? Through those very circumstances we are finding so difficult. And then finally, notice how the psalmist prays with honesty and with faith about his situation.

Look at verse 9. I say to God my rock, why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? As I was thinking about this psalm just a few minutes ago, I imagined somebody coming into my little brethren assembly in Carlisle to the prayer meeting and accusing God in the prayer meeting of forgetting him. I wonder how my fellow brothers and sisters would react to such honesty. Sometimes we're very polite in our praying, aren't we? But we're not very truthful.

We're not very honest. And you know I think God loved this man because of his honesty. He told God exactly how he felt.

Exactly how he felt about him. Exactly how he felt about his situation. And I believe God loves honesty in our prayers.

Sometimes we can be so dishonest, can't we? So dishonest with each other. I was reading a book a few months ago about communication and this book suggested, I'm sure there are many other suggestions, that there's five levels of communication. And the lowest level of communication is called communication by cliché.

Do you know anything about that? You go along to church on Sunday morning and you're kept at arm's distance with the arm shake and somebody says, how are you? And you say, oh I'm very well, thank you. Actually you feel foul, but you say I'm very well, thank you. And how have things been going at work this past week? You've had a terrible week, but you say, well, very good, thank you.

And that's how very often communication can go on. Just cliché communication. We don't think about what we say, we just talk.

The psalmist wasn't like that, even in his relationship with God. He was absolutely honest about his feelings and he expressed himself to God in that way. And notice finally verse five, how through all his difficulties, through all his depressions, he holds on to God tenaciously by faith.

I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God. He says, I know I'm going through a difficult time. I know I'm grappling with depression, but I'm going to praise him.

I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God. He says, I'm coming through. I'm coming through to a point of praise and gladness again.

This is not a formula which can deal with all depressions. That would be a very foolish suggestion. Some depressions are so deep that they need special counselling.

They may even need medical attention. But many of the difficulties which come into our lives, which take us down just for a few minutes, just for a few days possibly, I believe if we used these five secrets of the psalmist, maybe we could come up out of that pit of depression much more quickly. Let me just remind you of them.

Number one, he never forgot his God. He never forgot that God was his God, his rock, and so on. As he slithered down into depression, he stopped himself, turned around, and looked back and remembered God's faithfulness to him.

He challenged the despair. Why are you downcast? I'm not just going to sit here and allow depression to take over. Why are you downcast, O my soul? He began to look at the problems from another perspective.

What was God trying to do? And with great honesty and faith, he expressed himself to his Father. Next time you feel yourself slipping, maybe you should turn to the 42nd Psalm. Let's pray.

Father, we do thank you for your faithfulness and goodness. And Lord, if we just all stop now and look back over the last 12 months, it would take us a long, long time just to recall the thousands of incidents of your faithfulness, your mercy, your goodness. We thank you too, Lord, that you long to hear the honest expressions of our hearts.

You long to hear us saying just how we feel. Lord, we pray that you might grant us that honesty and reality in our communication with you and more and more with each other as well. Thank you, Lord, for this psalm.

Thank you for the practical instruction in it. Help us to apply it to our lives. Even today we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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