

The Marks of a Leader

by Peter Maiden

A leader is someone who has a God-given ability that makes others want to follow, and this ability is characterized by sincerity and reality, love and interest in people, interest in life and the world, and commitment to truth.

Duration: 41:53

Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:10

Topics: "Leadership"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses four key signs of God's gifted leaders. The first sign is the ability to draw others to follow them, which is achieved through a deep love of life and a commitment to truth. The second sign is the ability to grasp the key points in a given situation and have a vision for what needs to be done. The speaker uses the example of Daniel in the lion's den to illustrate the importance of perseverance and determination in leadership. The sermon emphasizes the need for churches to pray for leaders who possess these qualities.

Transcript

Now the subject this morning is the marks of a leader, and I want to read two scriptures to you. The first, a very short one, in 2nd Timothy 3, and then we'll go to the first chapter of Daniel. 2nd Timothy chapter 3, and just verse 10 and 11.

Paul's second letter to Timothy was the last letter he wrote on this earth, and it's a deeply emotional letter. Bishop Handley Mole said he found it very difficult to read this letter without something like a mist covering his eyes. He felt so moved, so emotional as he read these words.

And he is challenging Timothy to take over many of the leadership positions which he had when he was on this earth. And he's showing him in verse 10 of chapter 3 the example he has set him. And he says, Timothy, you know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions and sufferings.

What kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra? The persecutions I endured, yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. And then back to Daniel chapter 1. And just the first eight verses. Daniel chapter 1, verse 1. In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his God in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his God. Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility.

Young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well-informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table.

They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service. Among these were some from Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names.

To Daniel, the name Belteshazzar, to Hananiah, Shadrach, to Mishael, Meshach, and to Azariah, Abednego. But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine. And he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself in this way.

You'll often hear the question, is that person the kind of person who is a leader? In other words, we recognize that some people naturally take the lead in the situations they are in, while other people equally naturally tend to be followers. Now in this session, we're going to consider what the qualities are, the characteristics, that make some people the kind of person that others naturally want to follow. What marks out people as leaders? Now we could, of course, just head straight into a list of obvious characteristics.

Characteristics which you've heard over and over again already this weekend. Spiritual maturity, strength of conviction, a servant heart, and so on. Now these things certainly are important, but they're not the whole answer when it comes to what marks out a person as a leader.

So I don't want to concentrate this morning at all on general Christian characteristics. Every Christian, we want to see spiritually mature. Every Christian, really, we want to see with a servant heart.

I want to concentrate on specific qualities, specific characteristics, which are essential in leaders. You see, you can have two people who might be equally mature in the Christian life. They might have similar educational backgrounds, similar experience, and both will be able to exert some degree of leadership by the example of their lives, the wisdom that they've gained from their experience.

However, you will sometimes find that one of those people is able to gather others quite naturally and lead them forward. But the other person, a very similar person in many ways, if he tries to do the same thing, if he tries to gather others around him so that they will follow, somehow, it just doesn't happen. Why is that? Why are some people seemingly naturally good and others, equally mature, just don't seem to have the same effect? Well, I think when you come right down to the basics, God gives the gift of leadership to some Christians.

And he does not give that same gift to other Christians. Paul writes to the Romans about spiritual gifts in Romans chapter 12. He's urging the Christians at Rome to recognize and to use their gifts.

And this is what he says in verse 8. If your gift is encouraging, then let that person encourage. If it's contributing to the needs of others, then let them give generously. And if it's leadership, the gift of leadership, if it is leadership, let that person govern diligently.

And I think we should all praise God this morning, that in every generation of the Christian Church, the Lord Jesus, the risen Lord Jesus, gives the gift of leadership by his Holy Spirit to certain people who can lead others forward. And to recognize and to encourage people who are given that gift is a great responsibility of the church in every generation. Now just before we ask the question, how can we recognize these people? Let me say one further thing, and I think it's a very important thing, about the gift of leadership.

Faith is also a gift. This does not mean that there are some Christians who have not been given the gift of faith, and therefore they don't need ever to exercise faith. No, all Christians are to walk by faith.

But some are given a special gift in this area. You were encouraged to buy yesterday a book concerning George Muller. If anyone has ever been given a special gift of faith, then it's that man, Muller.

And when it comes to leadership, I think our attitude must be quite similar. You're not to sit back at the end of this message and say, well really, I shouldn't have been here this weekend. I just don't have the gift of leadership, and so I can relax.

I don't ever need to think of taking the lead again. No, that's not how we should respond. I believe we are all called to lead from time to time.

We're all called to take the initiative as situations arise in our Christian lives. But there are certain Christians who have been given a special gift, special abilities from the risen Lord Jesus Himself, and these abilities make other people want to follow them. Now, how can we recognize these people? I don't think there's an easy formula.

I don't think there's a particular list of characteristics that you can carry around with you. And as you meet people, you examine them, and you tick off these characteristics. And if you've got a tick beside every characteristic, then you've finally discovered one of God's gifted leaders.

No, I don't think it's going to happen like that at all. But I do believe there are some general principles. And this morning, I just want to share four with you, four key signs of God's gifted leaders.

Now, the first sign, and we've already mentioned it, is this ability to draw others to follow you. The ability to draw others to follow you. Someone once said, there are two quick questions you must ask a leader.

First, what do you want? What do you want? In other words, what are your dreams? What are your visions? And then the second question you should ask every leader is, where are your people? Where are your people? You may have great visions, great dreams, but no one's following you. You may be given a great position of leadership, director, but is anyone following you? If you have no people, then the title is a very little consequence. Jesus had the most amazing impact on people.

A carpenter's son, without special education, without ever writing a pamphlet or making a tape, has, as some writer has put it, made more impact on this world than all the armies that have ever marched, all the navies that have ever sailed, all the parliaments that have ever sat, and all the kings that have ever reigned. He took a band of poor, unschooled Galilean provincials and used them to light a revolution of love that continues to burn in the hearts of men and women throughout the world today. Just imagine, here's Jesus approaching Matthew, the tax collector, and the simple words, follow me, Matthew responds by immediately leaving his occupation and becoming a follower of Jesus.

Now, his occupation was a government job. He was working for the occupying forces in his nation. I wonder what they felt of him just laying down his tools and following Jesus.

Here's Zacchaeus, up a tree. He thinks he's safe from the scrutiny of Jesus. Suddenly, he is ordered, come down.

Jesus says, I must stay at your house today, and he immediately gets down, and off he goes with Jesus. This same man, Jesus, could turn away a mob intent on stoning a woman caught in the act of adultery with just one sentence of rebuke. The amazing impact of the Lord Jesus on people.

Now, we've already said this is a God-given gift, but as you think of the life of Jesus, there were certain aspects of his character which must have just drawn other people to follow him. Let me mention four. The one that always stands out for me is the reality and the sincerity of Jesus.

Dr. Luke reminds Theophilus at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles of all that Jesus began to do and to teach. You see, a very notable feature of the life of Jesus was that there was no dichotomy. There was no difference at all between his words and his deeds.

There was total complementarity. And I was so encouraged that Ian reminded us yesterday morning of how vital being is as well as doing. What Jesus was and what Jesus did dovetailed perfectly.

When John the Baptist sent his disciples to inquire whether Jesus was the Christ, here was the reply of Jesus. Go back and report to John what you hear and what you see. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, and so on.

One of the most attractive aspects of the life of Jesus, that which so many people found utterly irresistible, was here at last they had found a spiritual leader whose deeds matched, dovetailed with his words. The Apostle Paul could also write to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 4 and verse 17, I'm sending Timothy to you. Now listen to this astonishing statement.

He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church. There's a man talking about himself. Timothy's going to remind you of my life and you will see that my life agrees perfectly with what I teach everywhere in every church.

How we need leaders in the church today whose way of life motivates, whose way of life inspires others to follow. So they don't lead by instruction from a distance. They lead by example alongside.

The reality, the sincerity of Jesus was one reason why so many followed. A second reason which always stands out for me was his love and sheer interest in people. One of the most challenging aspects for me of the life of Jesus is the fact that this busy man with responsibilities on his shoulders that it's hard for us to contemplate, always had time for individuals.

The woman at Syker's Well, legion chained in the tombs, Zacchaeus up a tree. And even when Jesus was hanging on the cross, he had time for individuals. He looks down and sees a broken-hearted mother and the weeping disciple and immediately his concern is not for himself.

In the agony of crucifixion, his eye is fixed on individuals. Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother.

He turns to a dying malefactor. Today, you will be with me in paradise. And even as he's hanging there, he's praying for the people who've placed him there and for us, sinners down through the centuries.

Father, forgive them. They know not what they do. Think of the time, the care, the patience.

Jesus was willing to invest in Peter. What an aggravating character. One minute, he's having to rescue him from the waves as his water-walking experience ends, rather embarrassingly.

The next moment, he has to rebuke him. He says, Peter, you're a messenger of Satan. And then God actually has to open up heaven to quieten him down on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Three times he denies him in Pilate's judgment hall. And so much more could be said about Peter. But Jesus stuck with Peter.

His love for him is obvious. Simon, Simon, I have prayed for you that your faith might not fail. Are you at all surprised this morning that Peter followed Jesus? And who became the leader of the church in its early days? Who, if strong tradition is correct, died crucified upside down because of his faith? Yes, it was faltering, weak, mistake-prone Peter.

A man whom a leader had invested in. A man who was transformed by a leader who loved people. And if God hasn't given you an interest in and a love for people, you are not ready for leadership.

One Christian writer asks the question, why did people flock to Jesus? And his answer is this. There are all kinds of reasons, but perhaps the most fundamental was that Jesus chose to be their friend. If you're not willing to be friends of people, even aggravating people, you are not ready for Christian leadership.

But then thirdly, Jesus wasn't only interested in people, he was interested in life. He was interested in the world around him. Jesus was an utterly interesting person just to be with.

With all due regard to the poet Swinburne, Jesus was hardly the pale Galilean who he describes. The world has not really grown gray from his breath. Jesus brought color, energy, and life to his surroundings.

He was such a creative person. He motivated people to action by using illustrations, great parables to preach, great truths. His teaching has proven to be utterly unforgettable.

The unforgiving servant, the sower and the seed, the hidden treasure, the pearl, and so on. Who can forget the creativity of such teaching? You know, one danger in leadership is that you just become too narrow. Beware tunnel vision amongst Christian leaders.

You are so committed to your objective it's taking all your time and energy and commitment to goals and objectives is obviously essential. But please be careful that you don't become boring and utterly uninteresting to be with. Otherwise, those who you seek and trust will follow you, will very soon disappear.

I've been asking quite a lot of OM leaders recently about their interests outside their work. What hobbies have you got? It's interesting. You just got a blank expression from some of them.

What, what? Hobbies. Have you heard of hobbies? I hope you've got a broad, wide interest in life. I think Jesus had.

He was just a thrilling person to be with. Now, let me just give you a fourth point before we move on. I think the fourth reason why people followed Jesus was that he was so committed to truth.

Mark tells us how his ministry began. Mark 1 14. Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God.

Throughout his ministry, he never ceased to proclaim the truth of God. Whenever people came to him, he faced them with truth. The rich young ruler approaches.

What must I do to inherit eternal life? And the response of Jesus is to present to him the truth of God. He marks out for him the law of God. When Satan comes to the Lord Jesus, once again, the response of Jesus is just to present him with truth, a wall of truth.

It is written. It is written. Truth motivates.

Truth, wrapped up in enthusiasm, motivates even more. In 2 Timothy 3 and verse 10, the verse we read a few moments ago, Paul is challenging Timothy to follow his example in leadership. How does he begin? He reminds him of his teaching.

He says, Timothy, you know all about my teaching. Now Paul was writing in a day of doctrinal extremism. He'd earlier warned Timothy to avoid those who devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies which promote controversy rather than God's work.

But in this day of instability, Timothy had found someone whose teaching was consistent, whose teaching was clear. Truth motivates. And so Paul writes in 1 Timothy 3 and verse 2, the elder must be able to teach.

To Titus, he writes, Titus 1 and verse 9, the elder must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. And I look back to my youth fellowship days in Carlisle. I remember a young man who went off to Bible College.

His name was Derek. He was a keen, keen young Christian. He went off to Bible College and after the first year he came back, and I don't know who he'd been listening to, what particular lecturer, but he came back believing utterly in sinless perfection.

He believed he was totally perfect. Now you don't think there are people like that around today, do you? But I was talking to a pastor not far from here. I preached in his church, and he said, come and sit with me in the study.

I want to tell you something. So I went and sat with him. He said, Peter, I've never sinned for six years.

I said, what do you mean? You've never sinned in thought, word, or deed? He said, yes. I felt like saying, I'll ask your wife just to confirm that. But you know, after we talked, he said, look, I'll show you the way to the motorway.

Just follow me. So I got into my car and followed him in a 30 mile an hour limit, and I looked at my clock, and he was doing 43. So I flashed him, and he came walking back, turned down the window.

I said, isn't that sad? First time for six years. This fellow actually came back from college, utterly convinced that he was perfect. You know what he did? He got a little group around him who were equally convinced they were perfect, and then he went back to college, and he must have met another lecturer.

Because he came back a totally convinced Calvinist. I mean, John Calvin was in error. He wasn't strong enough.

Absolutely convinced if there'd been six points in the tulip, he would have had them all. And he presented Calvinism as it's never been presented before. He got a little group around him, went back to college.

I can't remember what he came back with next, but at the end of three years of Bible college, our youth fellowship was divided asunder, as we say. There were little groups all over the place. And you know the disciples become more extreme, don't they, than the person who has trained them and taught them.

See how vital it is for the leader to have stable doctrine, to know where he stands, to know the Word of God. Now when Paul says the elder must be able to teach, I don't think he means that every leader must be able to get up on the platform and preach the Word of God. He doesn't mean that.

He means that a leader must be a man of the Scriptures, must saturate and soak himself in the Scriptures, and must be able to relate the Scriptures to everyday life, and must be able to take others on with him by persuading them from the Word of God. We've seen all weekend, haven't we, that leaders do not lead by dominating. They lead by persuading, and we must persuade men from the Word of God.

Well, that's my first point. A leader is a someone who has a God-given ability which just makes others ready to follow. Part of that ability is this sincerity and reality, this deep interest and love for people, this deep love of life which makes people so interesting to be with, and this commitment to truth which is so motivating.

Now I've got three other points, but we'll be more brief with those which remain. A second key sign in a leader gifted by God, in my opinion, is this ability to grasp the key points in a given situation, to grasp the key points in a given situation. The gifted leader is able to put his finger on what's going on, and he has a sense of what ought to be done in a given situation.

In other words, they're going to come more quickly than others do to have a vision for the situation they're dealing with. You see, it's one thing to be able to draw others to follow you, but you've got to take them somewhere, haven't you? You've got to have a clear goal. You've got to have a clear vision of where you want to be.

Let me just give you one biblical example of this, seeing what others don't see. That's why I read to you the first chapter of Daniel. Now the scholars tell us that Daniel was a very young man in chapter 1. He was probably 16 or 17.

And Nebuchadnezzar faces Daniel with a very great test. I think Nebuchadnezzar was quite an intelligent fellow. I think he knew history pretty well, and he'd heard what the Pharaohs had done, left them in the fields to make bricks, and their national spirit had risen up, and they'd marched off to freedom.

Nebuchadnezzar said, that's not going to happen a second time. And so he hatched this plan. It was a very good one.

Take the finest young men of the nation, and put them into a university course for three years. Teach them all the language and all the literature of the Babylonians, the Chaldeans, so that they would become utterly Chaldean in their thinking, and they would never ever again want to lead their people to freedom. And everything seemed to be going very well.

The students were signing up nicely. No reaction from the National Union of Students. Everything was really moving forward in this Chaldean university.

But you know, part of the plan was that they would be given food and drink from the king's table. The significance of that was that it had first been offered to idols before being given to them. And for Daniel to partake would have been to take a massive step, to turn away from all his training, to turn away really from his nation, and certainly from his faith, and to accept a new way.

And then we read these marvelous words in verse 8. Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine. And as far as we can see, he was the only man who did that. He took the lead.

I can imagine the elders of Israel coming round these young men and saying, look, what a fantastic opportunity. We thought life under Nebuchadnezzar was going to be rough, but you have got tremendous opportunity for learning. Grab it with both hands.

And the people seemed to be going that way. But Daniel saw what others could not see. He was a God-gifted leader, as you can see throughout the rest of the book.

He had a vision which others didn't see. And he made this enormously courageous stand. It's a very important part of God's gift of leadership.

Now again, we recognize it's a gift. But at the same time, certain things must play their part. Two things.

Daniel himself said, the people who do know their God shall be strong and do exploits. Daniel's exploits were based quite simply on his knowledge of God. It's so simple, but nonetheless vital to stress.

The visionary leader is always going to be someone with a real knowledge of God. There were deep, consistent, personal relationship with him. Secondly, I believe clear priorities help in sharpening our vision.

Leaders will be people that everyone wants to use. If you're a Christian leader, you've already experienced that. I don't need to say it.

Leaders are people that everyone wants to use. And if you're not careful, you'll find yourself involved in a hundred and one things, none of which you'll be able to do very well, because you're doing too much. And you'll find your mind getting utterly cluttered.

Clear, decisive thinking becomes difficult, if not impossible. Now, I've had to warn you to beware of tunnel vision. People become very uninteresting if they're like that.

But I also have to warn you of the opposite. Over-involvement, over-extension of your life and of your ministry. I said earlier that one question you must ask a leader is, where are you going? Do you have a clear, definite goal? Are you dashing in a hundred and one directions at the same time? A cluttered mind will result.

And that ability to grasp the situation, to see what others do not see, will very quickly die. Well, that's a second mark. Through a knowledge of God and clear, uncluttered priorities, a leader is someone who often sees what others can't.

Very quickly, a third key mark. And that is the basic confidence that you can get the job done by God's help. But a personal confidence that the job will be done.

And that confidence inspires confidence in others. Now, often this confidence is most vividly seen when all the circumstances appear to be against you. Others around you are feeling there's no point in going on.

But the leader has that confidence that the job will be done. Listen to Paul in 2nd Corinthians 1, verses 8 to 11. We don't want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia.

We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we even despaired of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sense of death. That's how they felt.

They felt they had come to the end of their lives. But, Paul says, this happened that we might not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. Now, there's an example of a leader seeing what others didn't see.

Even as he faced the prospect of death, this leader could see what God was doing. But then he continues, He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us. On Him we have set our hope, that He will continue to deliver us.

That's that basic confidence, that basic trust, even in the most extreme circumstances. And so, Paul says to Timothy, 2nd Timothy 3, in verse 10, the verse we read, Timothy, you haven't only observed my teaching, but you have observed my faith. You have observed my confidence in God.

Now, this assurance that the job will be done was so evident in the life of Jesus. I will build my church, the gates of hell will not prevail. All that the Father has given me, shall come to me.

The mustard seed will become the greatest of all shrubs. It's a picture of the growth of the church. Just a handful of people, a mustard seed, that Jesus was absolutely confident, it would become the greatest of all shrubs.

Listen to Martin Luther, at one of the worst moments, the blackest periods of the Reformation. Though they take my life, my goods, my honour, my children, my wife, yet is their profit small, these things shall vanish all. The city of God remaineth.

Absolute basic confidence, that the job will be done. Now, we've seen already this weekend, that not all leaders have this confidence as a natural quality. Timothy, well, may well be an example of someone who had to learn this.

We've noticed Paul encouraging him towards courage and boldness against the spirit of timidity. And again, it's something which can be learnt through knowledge and experience. As your knowledge and your experience of God grows, so your faith and your confidence will increase.

We've mentioned the character Moses many times this weekend. And we've realised how he commenced a nervous, timid man. His response to the call of God was, who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh? A little later he says, oh Lord, I've never been eloquent, I'm slow of speech and tongue.

And eventually he was a very honest man, he just says, oh Lord, please send someone else. Exodus 4.13. But you read the song of Moses someday in Exodus 15. They haven't entered the promised land in Exodus 15.

But in the song of Moses, Moses is an utterly changed man. He's a man exuding confidence and assurance. He's a man who has learnt by experience that God is great.

And those with confidence in him will never be ashamed. Let's just briefly mention the last key sign of a gifted leader. And it's an obvious one.

The gifted leader is willing to fight through all obstacles. You see, you can draw other people after you. You can know where you're going.

And you can have that confidence which inspires. But it's not much use if when you come up against the first obstacle, you just fall away. The gifted leader has a clear goal.

And he has the determination to persevere until that goal is accomplished. He's not easily deflected from his course. He's a bit of a bulldog, really.

Tenacious, determined. Let's just go back to Daniel. He made a wonderful start for God as a teenager in chapter 1. But was he diverted from his course? Certainly, there were incidents enough to make most men falter.

Remember chapter 2? Nebuchadnezzar has a dream. I said he was an intelligent man. He wasn't a very pleasant man.

He had this dream and he forgot the dream. It's frustrating, isn't it? So he called the sorcerers and the magicians in. He says, you got two jobs this morning.

One, you tell me what my dream was. You just remind me. And then secondly, interpret it for me.

And I said, now come on, Neb. That's a bit too much. We'll interpret the dream if you tell us.

But what man on the face of the earth could tell you what your dream was? Nebuchadnezzar said, I'm busy. There's only two prospects this morning. You do what I tell you or you lose your head.

Now, Daniel was one of the wise men. And then when you get to chapter 6, you've got the lion's den incident. These were things which would have deflected many people from the course that they were on.

But you know, that 10th verse of Daniel 6 is just magnificent. When Daniel learned that the decree had been published, that's the decree concerning the lion's den, what did he do? He went home to his upstairs room where the windows open towards Jerusalem. Three times a day, he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God.

Now listen to these words. Just as he had done before. The prospect of a lion's den did not deflect this man one iota.

He just did as he'd done before. Perseverance, dogged determination, whatever the obstacles, moving forward. Nothing will stop these men.

There are four significant marks of gifted leaders. We need to pray that God will give us leaders like this in our churches today. The kind of people that others want to follow.

Reality, sincerity, a love for people, interesting people who love God and who love God's world. And people who have an utter commitment to truth, which is so motivating. People who can put their finger on

what's going on.

They see what others don't see. They have the confidence that the job can be done because they know God and have a clear objective. And when the problems arise and the temptation is to give in and others are giving in all around, as Paul said, he could be knocked down, but he was never knocked out.

God's leaders are not knocked out. They're knocked down from time to time, but they get up and they march on through the obstacles. We need to pray that God will give us gifted leaders with those marks in his church today.

I've talked individually with many of you this weekend and I've learned of situations where things do seem, at least on the surface at church or at the CU or wherever, to be going wrong. And we need to think through whether we, first of all, have grasped the situation clearly and whether we're willing to persevere. Maybe you might even want to write down on a piece of paper the name of a person that you've almost given up on.

And this morning God has just touched your heart and you've said, no, I'm going to persevere with that person a little longer. A situation that you've wanted to run away from because it is difficult. God has just tapped you on the shoulder this morning and said, I'm going to fight through the obstacles in that situation.

Let's just take a moment in silent prayer and meditation and don't be afraid to scribble something down if God has said it to you that maybe means action in the near future.

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