

Moving Forward in Faith

by Ron Corcoran

Ron Corcoran's sermon emphasizes the necessity of faith, prayer, and God's presence for the church to move forward in revival and transformation.

Duration: 42:10

Scripture: Exodus 33:20, Matthew 6:33, Hebrews 11:6, Hebrews 12:1-2

Topics: "Renewal"

Description

In this sermon, the pastor emphasizes the importance of being consistent in our Christian walk, whether in public or private. He encourages the congregation to use their God-given gifts and talents for His glory. The pastor also emphasizes the need for commitment to the church and the community. He shares about a conference he attended where they experienced joy and laughter, and some members of the congregation suggested he incorporate that into his sermons. The pastor concludes by sharing a personal revelation of seeing God as a friend and brother, rather than a harsh taskmaster. He reflects on God's faithfulness throughout his ministry and encourages the congregation to have faith like the saints who have gone before us.

Transcript

And please bow your heads, and I'm going to pray. I'm going to invite the children to leave for Sunday school at this time. Are there any left? And I'm going to pray a prayer, part of a prayer, that Dr. Don Sherman gave me a number of years ago.

Whatsoever you shall ask in my name, that will I do. Wherefore, I stand before you, and I dare to invoke you. Purify me of all taint of flesh and spirit.

Teach me to pray all right. Bless this day which you now give unto us, your unworthy servants. By the power of your blessing, enable me at all times to speak and act to your glory, with a pure spirit, with humility, patience, love, gentleness, peace, courage, and wisdom, aware always of your presence.

And I ask it, Father, in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated.

This past Wednesday night, I was at a conference. It was called a revival conference, and I'll tell you a little bit more about it later on in the sermon. But on Wednesday night... Joellen, if you can't keep the children quiet.

On Wednesday night, there was a group of people from this church that were at the same conference, and we probably... This was a sermon that went on. We probably never laughed so hard in our life, just from one line to another line to another line. It was a wonderful sermon, and you kind of... I stood there, I sat there, and I peed, and I thought, I wish I had that man's gifts to be able to do that.

When I went out into the lobby afterwards, the number of people from the parish said to me, Pastor Ron, you need to do that on Sunday. Now, I'm not sure they were talking about all the laughter and gaiety, or the 65 minutes that he preached. So I'm not sure.

So I'm a little bit confused about what the request was, but I will do accordingly. No, I'm not going to preach for 65 minutes, I promise you. About 10 days ago, I had Beth send an email out to you and ask you to pray for this morning's sermon.

How many of you did so? Be honest. Okay, so about a quarter of you did so. I want to say thank you.

But I have prayed, and I have prayed earnestly for the last number of days, and so what I'm going to do, what I'm trusting, I am trusting that God's presence is here with us. I'm trusting that the Lord is going to be here with us. Matter of fact is, I'm going to take my shoes off.

And I'm going to take my shoes off because I believe that I am standing on holy ground. Because when I stand with the Word of God, I'm standing on holy ground. And while I'm doing that, what I'm going to ask you to do is open your Bibles.

I'm going to ask you to open your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 11, and then I'm going to ask you to open your Bibles to Exodus chapter 33, because we're going to go back and forth between those two passages, and you need to have those in front of you. God is a God, according to the Hebrew passage that we read this morning, who is a God of faithfulness. Does anybody not have a Bible near me? Who does not have a Bible near me? I have three Bibles up here, and I'm not using any one of them.

I at least have two. There's another one. And you have taken the other Bible.

No, there's one more Bible here. Does anybody else need a Bible? Would you like a Bible? Okay. Hebrews chapter 11, Exodus chapter 33.

The reason why I ask people to bring their Bibles to the church, and I'll repeat it again, is because of the fact that you need to see what God is saying in the Word. You need to get your nose into the Word of God. Look at verse 1. It is impossible to please God without faith.

Anyone who wants to come to Him must believe that God exists and that He rewards those who sincerely seek Him. This morning, my intention is to please God. And my brothers and my sisters, I need you to hear me this morning.

I need you to shake any cobwebs out of your mind. I need you to leave lunch alone. It will take care of itself.

And I need you to really listen with your heart and with your spirit this morning. And as I proclaim to you God's Word today, not only am I proclaiming it to you, I'm also proclaiming it to myself. So do not think that I am standing up here, and this does not apply to me.

It applies to me completely. What I want is these words of mine. I don't want them to fall on a ground, and I don't want them to be trampled underfoot.

Instead, as Jesus said in Mark's Gospel, I want them to fall in the fertile soil of our hearts. And I want them to produce 30, 60, or 100 times what I sow here this morning. And what more could a preacher want? In 1987, I was ordained.

June 6, 1987, I just celebrated my 23rd anniversary. Shortly after I was ordained, I received a letter from headquarters. It was from the pension office.

And they said, Ron, guess what? You can retire March 1, 2018. I thought, wow, that's a long way away. I have lots of work to do, and I can basically proclaim the Gospel for 31 years prior to having to retire.

And I thought, 2018? My goodness gracious, maybe Jesus will come back before that. Maybe the Lord will return. I don't have to worry about it.

Well, my problem now is I can count the number of years that I have left on my fingers. Before, I couldn't count them on my fingers and my toes. But now I can.

You see, I don't know how God measures the ministry that I have done in the past 23 years. And one day, I'll stand before him, and he will tell me whether or not I have been faithful. I am in full agreement with Paul's words to the church in Corinth when he wrote, my conscience is clear, but that doesn't prove I'm right.

It is the Lord himself who will examine me and decide. So don't make judgments about anyone ahead of time before the Lord returns. For he will bring our darkest secrets to light and reveal our private motives.

Then God will give to each one whatever praise is due. When I do the math, I have approximately seven to eight years left as your pastor before I'm eligible to retire. When I look back on the last 23 years, I confess to you that it's been very hard work.

It's been disappointing work. It's been disappointing because I'm looking at my church, which is split. I'm looking at my church that turned its back on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And don't kid yourself, it has done so. It has turned its back on the word of God. And it has dared to call things holy that God says I call them unholy.

Working as a servant of God has been many, many challenges. None more so than the past couple of years. This past week, I spent a lot of time at a revival conference with many other pastors and lay people in the city of Victoria.

We went to this conference because we believe that God wants to bring revival to this city and to this country. As pastors, many of us are exhausted from working so hard and not seeing the fruit of our labor. We look around at our world, and it's in free fall.

If God doesn't personally intervene in this world, I'm terribly frightened of what the future may hold. But history tells me this. When God begins to move, he always begins with his people.

He doesn't begin with the world out there. He begins in his church. He began with the nation of Israel.

He begins with his church in order to refine his church in order for us to reach the world. God always starts with his chosen ones. The apostle Peter wrote, for the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God's household.

And if judgment begins with us, what terrible fate awaits those who've never obeyed God's good news. I don't even want to think about the terrible fate awaiting this world. Furthermore, if you don't think that the church of Jesus Christ is under judgment, you haven't been paying attention.

The church of Jesus Christ in the Western world is under what I would call severe judgment. The church in the Western world is very much like the church of Laodicea in the book of Revelation. Let me describe that church to you.

John writes, I know all the things you do. And the church is into everything. The church is into the environment.

The church is into social justice. I don't know sometimes if the church is social workers or the church are pastors and preachers of God's word. I don't know anymore.

And John says, I know all the things you do. But he says this, you're neither hot nor cold. I wish you were one or the other.

But since you're like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I'm going to spit you out of my mouth. You say, I am rich. I have everything I need.

I don't need a thing. And God says, you don't realize, but you are wretched, you are miserable, you are poor, you are blind, you are naked. So I advise you to buy gold from me.

Gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. And buy white garments from me.

So you'll not be shamed by your nakedness. An ointment for your eyes so that you'll be able to see. I correct and I discipline everyone I love.

So be diligent. And turn from your indifference. Look, I stand at the door and I knock.

If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in. And we will share a meal together as friends. I'm ashamed to say that for almost 23 years, I had for the most part forgotten that God was my friend.

Just before Jesus left this earth, he turned to his disciples and said, you are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you slaves or servants because a master doesn't confide in his slaves or his servants. Now you are my friends since I've told you everything the Father told me.

You didn't choose me. I chose you. On Thursday night at the conference during the ministry time, something happened in my heart.

For a long time, I have felt like Elijah. Elijah was an Old Testament prophet who felt that he was carrying the burden of all of Israel on his shoulders. And one day God said to Elijah, Elijah, what are you doing? And Elijah replied, I have been zealously, I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty.

But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you. They've torn down your altars. They've killed every one of your prophets.

And I'm the only one left. And they're trying to kill me too. You need not worry.

I'm not paranoid. I don't think anyone's trying to kill me. But I have been zealous for the Lord God Almighty.

I have felt in recent years that I've carried the burden of the Anglican Church of Canada on my shoulders and in my heart. I never realized until Thursday night how lonely and how forsaken I have felt. On Thursday evening, something broke in my heart.

And I've made a firm decision. I'm no longer going to see myself as a servant of God, but as a friend of God and as a brother of Jesus Christ. And that brother is my Lord and my Savior.

I stand before you today in repentance for seeing my Father in Heaven as nothing more than a harsh taskmaster and not, as Paul said, as Abba, Father. I can look back on the 23 years of my ministry and I can see the hand of a faithful God in my life. In spite of my weaknesses and my failures, God has been very faithful.

Like Moses in Exodus chapter 33, I can say without hesitation that God has looked with favor on me. But in spite of that, my brothers and sisters, I am not satisfied. My heart's cry is the cry of Moses' heart.

In verse 13, look down a bit, it says, If it is true that you look favorably on me, Moses said, let me know your ways that I may understand you more fully and continue to enjoy your favor. And remember that this nation is your very own people. I've taken the liberty of changing the last part of that verse to read and remember that this church, Father, is your church and these people are your people.

What did Moses want? He desperately wanted two things. First, he was desperate for God to go with them. Don't send me if you're not going to come with me.

He wanted the nations around them to see that God was with them. And Moses knew that God's tangible presence sent them apart from other nations. As it says in verse 14, God turns to Moses and says, Moses, I will personally go with you.

Moses, I will give you rest. Everything will be fine for you. The second thing that Moses wanted, in spite of all the wonderful experiences, you need to remember, Moses spent two 40-day periods up the mountain with God, in God's presence.

And in spite of that, do you know what he says? God, can I see your glory? And God says, no, you can't see my glory. You cannot see my glory and live. You cannot see my face and live.

Do you know why you can't see God's face and live? Because God is a holy God. And if I stood in front of God, in front of a holy God, I would disappear into nothing. If it's not for the blood of Jesus Christ, I can't stand in front of God.

God said to Moses, Moses, I love you so much that I'm going to just show you my back. I won't let you see my front. No, you're my friend.

I can't let you see my front. Moses wanted two things. I want two things desperately from God.

First, since we've joined the Anak family, we've been seeking God's direction and purpose for this church. On the first part of our journey, we found ourselves in the Book of Acts, and we'll get back there

eventually. But now I find myself in the Book of Exodus, journeying with Moses to the Promised Land.

And I firmly believe it was by divine intervention that God brought us to this place. For some reason, God wants Christ the King planted in this community. And if so, then I want God to come with us.

If God doesn't come with us, then I am going to take early retirement. Because I might as well. I might as well close the doors, sell these chairs, and go.

If God does not come with us. Without God, we are lost. I don't want to grieve or impede the work of the Holy Spirit.

So I'm going to ensure that my heart is right with God. On Thursday night, I grabbed ahold of the hand of God, and I'm not going to let it go. How is this community around us going to know that we're here at God's request? Unless His tangible presence is here with us.

We're not clever enough in our programs or our worship services to draw people to this place. But God's tangible presence will draw them. They will come not because we are here, but because God's presence is here.

He's the drawing card. The second thing that Moses wanted was God's glorious presence. The second thing I want, I want an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that is so strong that it will change our lives and the lives of those around us.

Remember this. He changes our lives before He changes someone else's life. He changes my life as your pastor.

He's going to change the lives of your parish council members before He changes the lives of the congregation. That's what's going to happen. So parish council, I'm giving you a heads up.

God wants to change us. The question we have to ask ourselves is this. Do I want to be changed? Am I willing to be changed? Ask yourself honestly this question.

When was the last time you felt a touch from God? When was the last time you were so keenly aware of His presence that you could almost reach up and touch Him? I believe with all my heart that God wants us to be here. And He wants us to know and to experience His glorious presence. Once again, I return to the opening verse of Hebrews chapter 11.

Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen. I believe with all my heart that passage of Scripture, and if you look down in verse 6, that passage goes on to tell us that our God is a God who keeps His promises. There are 1,784 promises in the Scriptures.

If you can bring me one that God has broken, I'll eat my Bible. If God is going to do His part, we have to do our part. The second part of our lesson, just turn over to chapter 12, says this.

Therefore, remember when Deirdre read that? The first 16 verses, there's actually about 30 verses there, but I knew it was too long to read. And all the way through it, it was by faith, it was by faith, it was by faith. By faith, all these saints have gone before us.

And then we get to chapter 12 and the writer says, Therefore, since we are surrounded by a huge crowd of witnesses, through the life of faith, do you know you can't see the huge crowd of witnesses, but they're

here? Every week we sing with angels and with archangels, with all the hosts of heaven, all the people that you love, all the people that have run the race ahead of us, they're here in some mysterious way, seeing that we're surrounded by such a great crowd of witnesses. Let's strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us.

And we do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. And because of the joy awaiting Him, He endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and now He is seated at a place of honor before God's throne. If God was faithful to all those people who went before Him, in that great cloud of witnesses... Darlin', I gave you the wrong sermon.

I got your sermon, and you have mine. I'll give you the rest of that. I had to add an additional note at the end of this sermon.

If God was faithful to all those people who went before us, to that great cloud of witnesses who watch our race, is there any reason for God not to be faithful to us? Can you think of a reason why, if God was faithful to all these people, if God's going to bless Lana, why wouldn't He bless Ereba? If God's going to bless John, why wouldn't He bless Anne? Who is this God? You see, there's no reason for God to be unfaithful to us. God will do His part. We have to do ours.

What is ours? Ours is twofold. First, we are to cast off the weight or the sin that trips us up. What are those weights and sins? Think about that for a moment.

What do you think are the sins that weigh the church down? I'm going to give you five. That's all I'm going to give you. Five.

There's many more, but I'm going to restrict myself to five. First, the church of Jesus Christ today is a church of prayerlessness. How do I know that? If people were praying, lives would be changed.

People would be repenting of their sins, and they would be coming to Christ. When was the last time you saw a person come to Christ? When was the last time you saw a person healed? We are not seeing that happen in the church in the Western world. I was told this past week that the average pastor, never mind parishioners, prays an average of only seven minutes a day.

I think they said a day. They may have said a week. Deirdre and I were not sure when we compared notes.

I believe that. Ask yourself this question. Seriously.

How many hours did you spend watching TV, on the computer, or doing your hobby, this week, compared with prayer? You don't know? Time it next week. And just see. See what happens.

See how long you spend in prayer and in Bible reading. Lack of Bible reading is the second sin that we need to cast off. For the most part, Christians are biblically illiterate.

And I don't mean that unkindly. Most Christians do not have a regular time of prayer set aside in their lives, nor do they have the discipline of reading the scripture, and they wonder why God seems so distant. Days go by.

Those days turn into weeks. Those weeks turn into months. And they've never turned to the scriptures.

And you say, how do I know that? Because I ask people. I asked people at 8 o'clock this morning, when was the last time you picked up the scriptures? And they couldn't give me an answer. I have been your pastor for 16 years.

16 years I've been telling people to read the scriptures. Have I not? I've repeated it again and again and again. I want you to hear it this morning.

This is coming from the Lord. Pick up your scriptures, open them up, and read your scriptures. You eat every day, don't you? Why are you starving your soul and your spirit? Why are you doing that to yourself? It's no wonder there's so much of the world in the church.

Because the people in the church have permitted the world to come in here. I don't say that in judgment. You see, people tell me they don't read the Bible.

People tell me they don't pray. Their lives are too busy. And adding prayer and scripture is just one more burden already to an overburdened life.

And furthermore, God is so polite, and God is so gentle, He will permit us to wander off like wayward sheep because He knows that we will return when we want something from Him or when we get into trouble. The next time we're surrounded by thistles and thorns, we'll turn to Him. And God, in His grace and His mercy, He will answer, because that's my Father.

And then we'll repeat the cycle again and again and again. I take no pleasure, no pleasure in having to say this to the body of Christ in this church. None.

And I'm not judging. I'm saying to you, the Lord has spoken to me. You need to open up your scriptures.

And if you don't open up your scriptures, bring them to me, and I'll give them away to people. The third sin is a sin of complacency or indifference. Most of us need absolutely nothing.

We are so blessed, and the pattern of our lives is the Old Testament pattern that we'll find in the book of Judges. If things are well and we're blessed and we're well fed, we can, for the most part, ignore God. And the book of Judges finishes with these damning words.

In those days, Israel had no king, and all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes. You know why people in the church do whatever they seem right in their own eyes? Because they don't know the Word. God says, if you love me, keep my commands.

Oh, it's very helpful if I don't know what the commands are. It's very helpful. You see, that sentence is true not only of those outside the church, it's true of many inside the church.

The church has forgotten we have a king, and his name is Jesus, and one day our knees will bow to him, and our tongues will confess. And that leads me to the fourth sin we need to cast off, and that is the sin of idolatry. What I'm talking about here is the heart.

What things have taken God's place in our hearts? Is it our homes? Is it our jobs? Is it our cars? Is it our TVs? What's taken this place? They may be good and wonderful things, but have they replaced the King of kings and the Lord of lords? We as individuals, and we as a church, need to repent of prayerlessness, lack of scripture reading, indifference, idolatry, and finally the sin of unbelief. It's not enough to say, Lord, I'm sorry for not praying. Then start praying.

Lord, I'm sorry for not reading the scriptures. Start reading the scriptures. Repentance is going the other way.

It doesn't mean saying, I'm sorry. It's sort of like if you have a child, and mom says not to do that. It's not enough for the child to say, Mom, I'm sorry I did that.

Go back and do it again. We do the same thing with God. You see, there's a great sin of unbelief in the church.

Many in the church do not believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to God. Many in the church do not believe that there will be a judgment. Nor do they believe that there will be a lasting consequence for sin and rebellion.

When we, the church, repent of these things individually and corporately, we will see the hand of God at work in our world. Your pastors and your parish council will be providing the necessary leadership to see that this comes to fruition. And if you hear about some of your parish council members resigning, blame me.

Because the leaders of this church, we have a desire to become an apostolic church. On your bulletin insert, on that blue sheet of paper, you see our plans for the remainder of 2010. Those things are the things that we have prayed about.

We took all your suggestions, all the things that you gave us on sheets of paper, and this is the things that God has laid in our hearts, and we plan to fulfill them. An apostolic church is a worshipping and praying church. And that means, as God's people, we worship and we pray at every chance we get, seven days a week.

An apostolic church takes learning seriously. We are not Sunday morning disciples, but disciples 24 hours a day, seven days a week. An apostolic church is a church of fellowship, where we walk in the light with one another, and we don't murmur, and we don't gossip about one another behind each other's backs.

We walk in the light with each other. We practice relational and incarnational theology. In other words, we are Christ to each other.

This morning when I came into the church, I snapped at Rodney. I had no reason to snap at Rodney, but I did so. So before I came to the Lord's table, I had to make myself right with God, and I had to make myself right with Rodney.

That's what God is talking about, being clear with one another, being in relationship with one another. We have a superb relationship, and I didn't want to change our relationship, and Rodney graciously forgave me. What I did was I changed the colors, and he asked me why.

And I didn't handle it very well, but it was my fault. The Apostolic Church believes in the use of charismatic gifts, and I don't mean just the super gifts. I mean the ones that provide every person in this church with a ministry.

If you are over 80, your job, pray for us. If you're under 80, you should have a ministry. And if you don't have one, come and see me or come and see the wardens.

Finally, the Apostolic Church does its ministry professionally. God is a God of order, and things need to be done decently and in good order. That means that our administration, our worship services, and our outreach into the community is going to be done to the glory of God, or it's not going to be done at all.

We do not want to shame or embarrass the God that we love, and so we're going to do things well. We're going to do them properly. On the back of the insert, we see that an Apostolic Church means that we recognize that we are called.

We are people of vision. Without a vision, my people perish, God said. We form Christ-like characters.

That means that we have unsupervised integrity. The pastor that you see standing here this morning should be the same pastor that lives at home. Should be the same pastor in the grocery store.

The same pastor at the gas station. The same people. We are to be Christ-like even when others are not watching.

We use the tools and gifts that God gives us in a competent manner to His glory and to His glory alone. We are committed to each other. We are committed to each other.

I am committed to this church. I'm going to give my heart, my soul, my body, my mind, my strength to everything in this church. We are faithful to the community where God has placed us.

And finally, as people, we communicate with confidence the gospel of Jesus Christ without compromising the gospel. Over the next six months, we need to do the following things. First, in our worship area, we need to purchase a new keyboard.

Matthew Skinner has graciously loaned us his keyboard for the past 15 months. He'd like to have it back. It's his.

And I told him he can have it back at the end of June. So, at the end of June, if we don't have another keyboard, all the music will come from the organ. Second, it seems that the Spirit is moving us because this came from a lot of people in this church to do a vacation Bible school in this neighborhood.

And the university has consented for us to use this facility for a full week in August. Prior to the VBS, we'd like to do a grad sale by donation so we can introduce ourselves to our neighbors and invite them to the VBS and possibly do an alpha course in the fall. In order to find out for us to do this work, in order to find out what God is calling us to do, we decided we needed to hire a part-time community liaison person.

And that person is Carol Beaman Dodd. She is going to be spending her days getting to know this community and she's going to come back to us and advise us of the needs. She'll be interacting with other ministries in this neighborhood and introducing us to families and to children.

We only want to do the things that God lays in our hearts. And we want to bring this gospel to this community. Not only in words, in deeds, but in words.

As I said before, we're not social workers. The only person who's going to transform any of our communities is going to be God. And we need to have confidence in the gospel that God will do what we ask.

As a parish, we need to put in a sound system in this facility. At the present moment, we're renting the system we have at \$450 a month. And at the end of six months, we'll have paid for one in rentals.

We need to purchase a system as soon as we can, and that system is going to cost about \$3,000. And the rest of the things on that insert are quite minor, but we want to advertise who we are and it costs money for signs, etc. I'm coming to the end.

I want to give you the good news. Want me to give you the good news now? Here's the good news. We don't have any money to do these things.

We're only going to do them as God provides. If there's no keyboard, sorry, if there's no sound system, Rodney and I will talk louder. We're going to do them as God provides.

You know what that means? That means that we're going to have to trust God to provide. In our new life in Antioch, we don't have buildings as security for a loan. We're not eligible for a line of credit or a loan.

So we're going to have to trust God. Now isn't that a wonderful position to be in this morning? We have to trust you. Because we don't have this.

We don't have any. We have nothing. As I close, I'm going to remind you of this.

First of all, my brothers and sisters, as your pastor, you need to hear this. I love you dearly. I absolutely love you dearly.

I've given my life to this place, and I'll continue to do so. As your shepherd, this has been hard to come to you this morning and to give this word of the Lord. I need us to become a church of prayer, a church of scripture readers.

I need us to communicate with one another in love. And when we offend one another, to have the grace and the courage to go and make it right. We need to walk in the light with one another.

We need to stop judging one another. We need to stop murmuring against one another. We need to stop gossiping against one another.

We need to be Jesus. That's all I'm asking. I'll try to be Jesus to you.

I'll fail again and again, but I'm going to try. I'm going to do my very best to be Jesus to you. The writer to the Hebrew says, it's impossible to please God without faith.

Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and he rewards those who sincerely seek him. Father, we're seeking you. We believe you exist and you say you reward those who sincerely seek you.

Father, I'm seeking you with all my heart and all my soul and all my mind and all my strength. Those of you who have been moved by the spirit of God here this morning and you've caught the vision as I laid it out, my final counsel is this. Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

Give your gifts in private and your father who sees everything will reward you. Thank you for your grace in listening this morning and because you have been so graceful, I'm going to buy you all coffee and tea.

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