

# Skyland Conference 1980-09 Christian Stewardship

by Stan Ford

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*Stan Ford's sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding and stewarding our fleeting lives in accordance with God's purpose and teachings.*

**Duration:** 44:53

**Topics:** "Christian Stewardship", "Obedient Living"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the stewardship of our fleeting lives and the importance of understanding the intent of our lives. He emphasizes that every person, regardless of age, must consider the purpose and direction of their life. The speaker references the story told by Jesus about a man who was called to work in a vineyard, highlighting the need for action and obedience in fulfilling the intent of our lives. The sermon encourages listeners to have receptive hearts, listening ears, and obedient wills in order to hear and follow God's voice.

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## Transcript

You are aware that during the past evenings we've been, and mornings, we've been considering together something called Christian Stewardship. It has taken us into many parts of the New Testament, and we have considered many aspects of it. For this evening, I want us to consider what James says about Christian Stewardship, although he doesn't use the word.

I want to talk about the stewardship, if I may, of our fleeting life. Is it not remarkable that God has given to every one of us life and breath? And it is in Him we live and move and have our being. Apart from God, there is not one of us would have a moment in this sea.

And He has made us stewards of this life. It's come from Him. One day, every man and woman will answer to God.

But I want to speak this evening, especially to those who love the Lord Jesus, about the stewardship of our fleeting life. And so, if I may, I'm going to ask you to turn with me, please, into the epistle of James. And we'll read that one verse in the fourth chapter.

The fourth chapter of the epistle to James, please. Just one verse. I say, I've got myself a new Bible.

It's about four weeks old. Do you find with new Bibles that pages won't turn? Cool. It's either that or I've been spitting on it or something.

Ah, there it is. James chapter four, please. And I would like to read the one verse, verse fourteen.

Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow, for what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. Shall we pray? O God and Father, each one of us are aware of the fact that during the past days, thou hast had somewhat to say unto us. We pray that you'll say something again tonight.

The speaker longs that you will continue to speak to him. Each one in this conference longs that we may hear thy voice. That going from this place, we might not just be able to say it's been good for us to have been there.

That's true. But it's been good for us to have been there, for we've heard the voice of the Lord. Give to us then, we pray, receptive hearts, as thou didst give to us listening ears, that grant most of all obedient wills.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. I have but three things I want to share with you tonight.

Three questions I believe every one of us must face. The first question is simply this. What is the intent of your life? Now please, I am not just speaking to the younger folk.

I know, normally speaking, when one approaches such a subject as this, the preacher looks at the young folk and says, you have life in front of you. What is the intent of your life? But I remember the story the Lord Jesus told of a man who came at the end of a day, and Jesus said, go, work in my vineyard. And when eventually he came to pay those that labored, the man that worked at the end of the day received the same wages as the man who'd started at the beginning of the day.

So please, to every one of us this question is addressed. And it's a very simple one. What is the intent of your life? The second question is very similar, as the third is very similar.

So the second question is not what is the intent of your life, but what is the content of your life? You see, there is life and there is life abundant. There is life in essence, but there is life in quality. And so I must ask, what is the intent of your life? And I must ask, what is the content of your life? And all of you will give me my last question, because it's the one of the fourth chapter of James.

What is the extent of your life? But before I even look at the three questions, I want to say something about life. I am certain that most of us this evening, when I started off by saying I was going to talk about being stewards of our fleeting life, most of us thought immediately of the words of the first chapter of Philippians, where the apostle sums it all up and he says, For me to live, for me to live is Christ. What a tremendous statement that is.

But you see, the epistle to the Philippians is an epistle about life, isn't it? It's Paul's great epistle about life. You remember in that fourth chapter, he tells us so much about life. He says that a Christian life is, first of all, a resolute life.

How important it is for us to remember that. That each one of us might understand that when he writes and says, My dearly beloved and longed for stand fast in the Lord. Or how it's necessary for each one of us to be absolute resolute when it comes to the matter of what our type of life is going to be.

The Christian life demands from Christians that they'll stand fast. It is something that is required of all of us, that we may be found as those that stand fast. There are many of our good friends here today from Spanish West.

They all remember with great affection and great love my greatest friend, Bill Patterson. I had the joy of laboring with Bill for so many years. But one of the great sermons I remember Bill preaching, one of the great sermons I remember him preaching, circled around three classes of Christians.

I can almost see him now as he stood and pointed his finger and said, There are three classes of Christians. There are workers. There are shirkers.

And there are jerkers. And isn't that true? I don't want to preach his sermon, although it made such an impression on me I could, after twenty and more years. Sufficient to remind you that he took us away into the great book of Nehemiah and he told us of the men of Tekoa who had a mind to work, who built the wall.

But next unto them came the nobles of Tekoa. The nobles of Tekoa. And they didn't have a mind to work.

Oh, they were absolute shirkers. They put not their necks to the work of the Lord, he said. And then he reminded us, of course, of the priests who started out so well.

Did such wonderful things when the walls were built. And in the end, the very daughter of the high priest is living in sin in the house of God with one of the wickedest men we are told about in the book of Nehemiah. Today I find in the church of God those three classes of people still.

It was ever so. I love to talk about a New Testament church, but I want you to understand this. I've never read in the Bible about a perfect church.

When you talk about a New Testament church, don't you forget that the Spirit of God referred to some as carnal Christians. And they were in the New Testament church. The Spirit of God speaks of those who turn back.

And they were in the New Testament church. The New Testament church was not a perfect church. It consisted of workers.

And it consisted of jerkers. And it consisted of shirkers. But God challenges your heart and mine and says to me tonight, what sort of life is yours? Is it a resolute life? Is it a life indeed where you stand fast for the Lord? Please, please.

We were reminding our hearts this afternoon that it was the church at Philippi where Paul was smitten with Rod. He was beaten. Cast into prison.

Where everything vile happened to him. And yet he writes to those Christians who knew all about it. No, I will not add.

I dare not add. But dare I suggest that those Christians when the letter was written or read to them would have said to themselves, well, we saw Paul stand fast for the Lord. He stood fast for the Lord.

But look what it cost him. Beaten. Cast into prison.

Seemed as though he would be put to death. And he asked us to stand fast. But as we were reminding our hearts, the man that was cast into prison was the man who eventually left Philippi and went down to Thessalonica.

And he walked for 80 miles to get there. And he walked with feet that bore still the marks of those fetters. And he had a back that was desperately sore.

But although he had sore ankles and a sore back, he had a wonderfully warm heart. And what a difference that made as he arrived in Thessalonica. And they realized that it was something worth doing to stand fast in the Lord.

Would you notice that this life should be a resolute life? And it should be, or I must say this, just in case, please, just in case. If it is going to be life at all, it's got to be a regenerated life. For chapter 4 not only tells us to stand fast, but chapter 4 tells us of some, and they were women whose names were in the Book of Life.

Has your name been put in the Book of Life? Is it written down there? Oh, how important it is to realize that our names can be in the Book of Life. Regenerated. Born again.

Brought into the family of God. And have it all written down. For the wonder of it.

You see, until you come to know Jesus Christ, you really haven't got life. Do you remember that silly old story of mine, of the Englishman who went away to Scotland for a holiday? Now, I must be careful of my story. I used one this afternoon.

And it dawned on me none of you knew whatever I was talking about. Long distance lorry driver. Well, whoever knew what that was.

Let me just explain it. A long distance lorry driver. A lorry is a truck.

What you call a truck. And a long distance truck driver, that's what I was talking about. Simple as that.

You will pardon me having to explain it. But there it is. But nevertheless, nevertheless I must be careful with my story.

But the story is told you will know, for some of you have heard me use it. The story is told of an Englishman who went away to Ayrshire in Scotland for a holiday. And while he was there, he died.

No need to laugh. He died. And they didn't quite know what to do with him.

They didn't know whether to bury him in Scotland or send him home to England. So lots of telegrams were sent back and forth. And eventually he was buried in a little kirkyard in the heart of Ayrshire.

But even in those days, the Scotch nationalist was rather strong. And at the next parish meeting, if that's what you call them here in America. At the next parish meeting, one of these Scotch nationalists got up and said, Listen, our graveyard is nearly full and you bury Englishman there.

It was the 4th of July all over again. He said you bury Englishman there. I propose that never again shall an Englishman be buried in our kirkyard.

And it was argued about and it was proposed on and it was voted on. And it was carried that no Englishman should be buried in the kirkyard. And in due time a notice was put up there in the kirkyard which said, This kirkyard is reserved for the dead living in our village.

And I'll tell you something. I've got a feeling there are some dead folk living in this building tonight. You breathe.

You run. You eat. You move.

You sleep. But as far as God is concerned, you're dead in trespasses and sin. You've never taken Jesus Christ as your Savior.

Let me tell you something. This is the life that you need. A regenerated life.

You need to come to Jesus Christ and take Him as your Savior and find Him. But He gives life. It's a gift from God.

The wages of sin is death. But the gift of God is eternal life. Oh, isn't that great? Do you know the finest definition of eternal life? I was speaking to a good brother before the meeting about it.

The finest definition of eternal life is Ephesians chapter 3. That Christ may dwell in my heart by faith, that I might be filled with all the fullness of God. Isn't that wonderful? It makes you feel you just want to shout hallelujah. That a human being has the possibility of being filled with all the fullness of God.

If we don't get excited about that, it's about time we did. And we ought to show it forth to others. Oh, that we might have a resolute life.

That we might have a regenerated life. I say, verse 4, chapter 4 dares to tell us we ought to have a rejoicing life. I like that, don't you? A rejoicing life.

Why, that very verse tells us this. Rejoice always. Ah, but it says more than that.

It says rejoice in the Lord. We can't always rejoice, can we, for the circumstances of life? How many times have you and I found ourselves a little in the situation of Job? When he lost his wealth, lost his health, lost his family. And his very wife turned to him and said, Why don't you curse God and die? But it was in circumstances like that, that Job could lift his eyes to heaven and say, The Lord has given.

The Lord can take away. I'll rejoice in the Lord. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

He couldn't rejoice in losing his wealth. Not one of you could. He couldn't rejoice in losing his health.

Not one of you could. He couldn't rejoice in losing his family. Not one of you could.

But oh, he could rejoice in the Lord. In the darkest of circumstances. And here the apostle says, I'll tell you what a Christian life is all about.

It's a resolute life. Why? It's a regenerated life. It's a rejoicing life.

And I like this. I like this. It's a restful life.

A restful life. What? At the conference? I've got a feeling my good brother Roy is going to take me aside afterwards. A restful life? But that's what it's all about.

The peace of God which passeth all understanding. Keep your hearts and minds to Christ Jesus. The only way you and I will know real rest, the only way we'll know real peace, is through the blood of Christ.

And day by day, the ministry of the Spirit of God to our hearts. That peace of God which passeth all understanding. Heming us in.

Granting to each one of us the realization that He keeps our hearts, and listen, He keeps our minds. For Christian friend, remember this. If you are trusting the Lord Jesus, you've not followed cunningly devised tables.

The Christian faith asks of no one that they shall commit intellectual suicide. And if someone tells you you mustn't think, you tell them where to go. And if you don't tell them, I'll tell them.

I only know this, that I have a Saviour, blessed be His name, who gives peace. And there's rest. But one thing I want to remind you of.

Please, I want to remind you of because one of our brethren in the Bible reading was speaking a little along this line. He was reminding us it's only when we know Christ that we have peace, peace with God, and the peace of God, because we know the God of peace. But you won't forget this, will you? That if you are at peace with God, you'll be at war with the devil.

Don't you get away from that. Peace, the peace of God is not something that is so stationary that we never move in it. It keeps us.

It gives us peace and rest. But oh, blessed be His name, it sets us forth in activity for nothing. But please, not only is this life that I want to talk about a resolute life, standing fast.

Not only is it a regenerated life, that our names are written in the Book of Life. Not only is it a rejoicing life, I rejoice always in the Lord. It is not only a restful life, but the very peace of God will garrison my heart and mind.

But more than that, it is a receptive life. It is a life that receives from that eternal resource that which is necessary day by day. For verse 19 of that chapter, the Apostle says, My God shall supply all your needs.

My God shall supply all your needs. We had a dear brother in our fellowship long ago who had the habit of saying, Be careful for nothing. Be prayerful for everything.

And be thankful for everything. And this is just what we've got to be. Those who have a life that's vital and real.

Now the first thing I want to say, by the way, that's only the introduction, I haven't got started yet. The first thing I want to say is this. This question.

What is the intent of our life? Now the more I open my Bible, the more I realize that both in the Old Testament and in the New, there are men whose lives were pleasing to God. Of course, you know that there are only two people of whom that expression is used. One was Enoch, and one was the Lord Jesus.

The only two in the Bible of whom it said they pleased God. But all of us are aware of the fact that there were many others who pleased God, although the expression is not used. But as I open my Bible and I think for a moment and I say to myself, Now who are the men and the women who have left behind for me a plan for a life that has real intent in it? I think I would go first of all to dear old Daniel.

We don't sing it very often today, do we? But it's still a lovely old hymn, isn't it? Dare to be a Daniel. Dare to stand alone. Dare to have a purpose firm.

And dare to make it known. And here today we're thinking of Daniel, the man who purposed in his heart to serve God. The man that purposed in his heart to serve the Lord that he would not defile himself with the King's portion.

Oh, please. He was but a young man. He'd been carried away down into Babylon.

He'd been taken away from Jerusalem and now he finds himself and before him is placed the portion that came from the King's table. And he knew that nothing must cross his lips if he was to stand fast for the Lord that had been offered to idols. And so he purposes in his heart that he will not defile himself.

I don't know about you, but I long that I might be that sort of Christian. I'm not suggesting I am, but I want to tell you this. I long that I might be.

I long that when those things which are contrary to the mind of God are offered to me, that I might be willing, very willing to say, no thank you. No thank you. How often in the Word of God Christians are exalted to leave things.

I suppose the classic is the great statement made to Timothy, O man of God, be these things. There are some things that you and I have no right to touch. We have no right to allow them to pass as it were our lips.

No right to give them any place in our mind. The devil may put them in there, but we're the people responsible for keeping them there. And we've got to flee them.

And here we see as stewards of this fleeting life, we have to face life and say what is its intent? And surely we have to say our intent in our life is that we shall be like Daniel. I've already made mention of Nehemiah. Or if ever there was a hero of mine in the Old Testament, it's Nehemiah.

Well, we took you through Nehemiah once, so I'll say no more. Sufficient to remind you of the three great points I made about Nehemiah. He was not a preacher.

He was not a prophet. He was not a priest. Nehemiah was what we would call today they wouldn't have called him it then of course, but what we would call today a Christian businessman.

A man who was the king's cup bearer. A man who was honest and could be relied upon. But when God wanted a job to be done, are you listening you preachers? He didn't go to a preacher.

When he wanted a job done, he didn't go to a priest. When he wanted a job done, he didn't go to a prophet. When he wanted a job done, the greatest revival in the Old Testament, when he wanted a job done, he went to a man who had a business job to do.

And he said, Nehemiah. And he went. And he went.

Oh, what a person Nehemiah was. I wonder, he was concerned about Jerusalem and about his people. He sat down and wept when he heard of the terrible things that were happening.

May I ask you three questions please? I'm not going to suggest answers, but can I ask you three questions? If I ask them of Nehemiah concerning Jerusalem, I know what his answer would be. But how about yours? This is the first question. Are we concerned about the church? That's the first question.

And I ask that in the light of what Brother Taylor has been challenging our hearts on. Are we concerned about the church? The second question I want to ask is, are we committed to the church? And the third question I want to ask, are we cooperating with the church? Oh, Mr. Nehemiah, just a moment sir, just a moment. Are you committed to Jerusalem? I say, Mr. Nehemiah, are you concerned about Jerusalem? Are you committed to Jerusalem? Are you cooperating with the folk who are in Jerusalem, weak and feeble though they be? What is the intent of my life? Have I sat down and settled what God wants me to be? Please, if I speak of two Old Testament characters, I must speak of a New Testament one.

And what other one could I talk of then, Paul? Oh, I know I could have spoken of James. I know I could have spoken of John. I know I could have spoken of Peter.

I know I could have spoken... Oh, there are so many. And may I just say one word about Paul and simply say this, that when I see that man falling to the ground and I hear his cry, what wilt thou have me to do? I know here is a man who is completely committed to the Lord. What is the intent of our life? Are we just saying, well, I want to make a name for myself.

I want to build a big business. I want folk to realize that I am. Are we prepared to be completely engulfed in Jesus Christ and dare to say that the name of Christ lives forever if mine has to perish? But if I ask what is the intent of our life, I must ask what is the content of our life.

Now, a man who starts with the right idea of things, a woman who starts by saying, Lord, I am going to be yours. This is the intent of my life. He will and she will show the things that I have already spoken of from the fourth chapter of Philippians.

But it seems to me there are many other things that will be seen. And I want, if I may please, just to take you again into that epistle to the Philippians. Not now in the fourth chapter.

I am going to do what you should never do. I am going into the third chapter now. I should have spoken about that first, but I didn't.

But I want to do it now. As I look indeed and think of the content of a Christian life, then I dare suggest this to you, that a man or a woman who says, Christ for me, for me to live is Christ, is a man or a woman who has new values. Can I repeat that? A man or a woman who has new values, verse 7 says this, what things were gained to me, those I counted lost for Christ, what were Paul's values? I think his values were all locked up in a religious life.

Now please, please, I think most of you know me well enough to know this, that I do not contribute to that sort of preaching that stands up and tells people that religion is wrong. If you ever have a preacher in your hall or chapel who stands up and says, I don't preach religion, I'll tell you what to do. You jump up and say, just a moment, wait while I leave.

Do you know what the Bible says pure religion is? It's the visiting of the fatherless and the widows. And the keeping yourself unspotted from the world. And if we don't preach that, it's about time we did.

Don't preach religion. I'll preach religion. I'll preach religion until I go home to glory, I will.

The visiting of the fatherless and the widow. If a Christian doesn't visit those in need, who ought to visit them? Keeping ourselves unspotted from the world, that's the worst of us today. You have a job to tell who's a Christian and who isn't.

But please, oh please, let me put something right unless I get accused of bad theology. I'll preach religion until I go home to glory. But I won't preach that religion fades.

Because you can visit every widow in North Carolina. You can keep yourself unspotted from the world that people look at you and consider you to be an absolute mystic. And still not have your name written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

It's Calvary that saves. Christ that saves. It's the blood of Jesus that washes things away.

And that alone. But oh, don't let us despise religion. And this man, this man's soul of Tarsus, oh, his values were in his religion.

His values were in serving his God as he'd been taught in his way. And even if it meant standing and watching the murder of Stephen, he was willing to do it so sincere was he. If it meant taking letters that gave him authority to take all who loved the name of the Lord, to cast them in prison and put them to death, he was willing to do it.

But one day he met Jesus. And he had new values. New values.

What are your values? Maybe there is someone here whose values are religion. God bless you. Oh, God bless you.

If there's someone here today trying to work your way to heaven, God bless you because if He doesn't, no one else will. You can't work your way to heaven. I can't work my way to heaven.

And when I come to know Jesus Christ and I'm given His life, this new life, it's a life with new values. Those things which were gained to me. Those I count lost.

I have counted lost for Christ. It is not only a life with new values, it's a life with new... Are you listening? It's a life with new ventures. Oh, I like that.

He says that I may win Christ. Hold just a moment. Hold just a moment.

Whoa! Whoa! I don't understand that. Whatever you're doing talking about winning Christ, I thought you'd won Him. I say, Paul, when you write this letter, you've been on the road about 35 years.

You've known Jesus as your Savior. You're talking about winning Him? I thought you'd won Him when you were on the road to Damascus. This is... What do you mean winning Christ? Isn't it wonderful that in the Christian life there's always something to gain? There's something more to know about the Savior.

You know, I know a little about the Lord Jesus. Well, I ought to if I've known Him for 38 years or 40 years now that I've known Him, if I've been serving Him 38 years. I ought to know something about Him.

But I want to tell you this. Every time we have a Bible reading like we had this afternoon, I realize there's something more for me to know. And I say, thank you, Lord, for teaching me that.

Thank you, Lord, for teaching me that. And isn't it wonderful that day by day we learn something more of Him that I may win Christ? There is one story, one story that I always link with that text. And I must link it today, although you won't find it on the notes when you pick up the notes.

But there's one story that I always link with it. Do you know what it is? It's the story of Neil. Isn't that a wonderful story? I mean, it's a hallelujah story.

You remember there in the opening chapters of the book of Gadjet? When suddenly there was curjaph sephir, and there it was on the top of a hill, and it wasn't conquered. And old Caleb said, He that smiteth curjaph sephir and taketh it, I will give Axa my daughter to be his wife. And old Arseneal came away.

And you remember Arseneal was in the family already. He was cousin. In the family.

What is it you say down here in the south? Kissing cousins. I don't know what that means, but it sounds good. I only know this.

There was Arseneal. And Arseneal, he was in the family already, but he wasn't contented with just being in the family. He wanted Axa to be his wife.

And it's love wanting. Do you remember? He climbed the mountain, so it was love warring. Now that's nice, isn't it? Wanting.

And now there's love warring. And do you know what? You young men, you young women, let me tell you something. Arseneal couldn't conquer curjaph sephir on his own if he tried from the beginning of the year to the end.

Though lots of others must have gone with him and gone into the battle and enabled him to conquer the city. And yet they're never mentioned. The only person, we're told, who climbed the mountain and conquered curjaph sephir was Arseneal.

Do you know when I trusted the Lord Jesus? I'll tell you something. I, over the years, have had thousands of people who've helped me. Thousands of people.

We were reminding ourselves today about those blessed crowns that one day He will administer to those who've won them. And I said, the difficulty about talking about crowns is this. Who's going to get them? I may kneel by the side of a young man and point him to Christ.

And then I get up and I find out that I had nothing to do with it. His mother had been praying for him all her life. Before he was born, she prayed for him.

I suddenly find out there's a godless Sunday school teacher a Bible class leader a workmate that he's worked with. I suddenly find out that this... Do you know what I don't do now? I'll tell you what I don't do. How fast is it? No, it's not.

No, it's not. Listen. I'll tell you something.

I found this out years ago. Years ago. That when the crowns are given out, the people that maybe you and I don't know anything about, they're going to get them.

They're going to get them. Oh, and Arthur Neale went up with others to fight. And he conquered, you know.

He conquered. And then he came down. And oh, he got Axter to be his wife.

But I want to tell you fellows something. Especially you young men who are engaged. You know, you're not married yet.

Let me tell you something. Blessed is the fellow that gets a beautiful girl for his wife. Twice blessed is the fellow that gets brains as well as beauty.

Because after Arthur Neale had got Axter, then Axter said, you go and ask my dad for a farm. I want to live to the same standard I've always had. You go and ask my dad for a farm.

And off he went for a farm. And after he'd gone, then she went. She knew that if she'd gone first and then he'd have gone, Dad would have said, I've already given you something.

But she sent him first. Isn't it wonderful that God gives us but hallelujah, for Christ's sake, he gives us all things. And here we are today as those who should have a content.

New values, new ventures, new victories, new visions. But I come to a close. Listen friends.

Not what is the content of my life or what is the intent of my life, but what's the extent of my life. James says, it's but a vapor. And that's the most solemn note I could possibly, possibly finish on.

That tonight, every one of us have to realize we're one step nearer eternity. And what you didn't do for Jesus today, you'll never have today again. It's lost.

It's lost. Oh, that we as good stewards of our fleeting life may be found serving him for his name's sake. We're singing the closing number 252 in the red book and 199 in the green book.

Come every soul by sin oppressed, there's mercy with the Lord and he will surely give you rest by trusting in his word. Maybe there is one here tonight that needs to trust the Savior. You've heard the gospel tonight.

You've heard the word of God. You've heard that the blood of Christ can cleanse you from all sin. Maybe there's one that needs to trust him, this audience tonight.

Why don't you do it? When we sing this wonderful hymn, just ask the Lord Jesus Christ to come into your heart and life. You want to move down to the front when we're standing and singing? Do so. If you need help, we'll be glad to help you.

We'd be glad to point you to the Savior. Why don't you settle it tonight? Why don't you come to the Lord Jesus Christ? Shall we stand as we sing his hymn? Come every soul by sin oppressed, there's mercy with the Lord

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/10/SID10427.mp3>

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