

# From Simon to Peter #25 - the Holy Spirit and Peter's Personality

by J. Glyn Owen

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*The Holy Spirit's power enabled Peter to master his personality problems, become integrated into the community, and assume his destined role of leadership without causing a rupture of the fellowship.*

**Duration:** 46:37

**Scripture:** Matthew 14:22-33, Matthew 16:18, John 1:42, Acts 1:14, Acts 2:14, Acts 4:13, Acts 12:5-11

**Topics:** "Simon to Peter"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the character of Peter and his journey from fear to boldness. The speaker highlights Peter's native timidity and fear, which was evident in his life. However, the speaker emphasizes that Peter's fear was short-lived when the Holy Spirit came upon him and his fellow believers at Pentecost. With the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter was able to overcome his fear and move forward towards his appointed destiny. The speaker encourages the audience to reflect on their own fears and challenges them to step out in faith, trusting in God's calling for their lives.

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## Transcript

Some considerable time ago we began a series in our morning worship, which we entitled, From Simon to Peter. What we have before us this morning is a continuation of that series, though we have not billed it as such. Because we find that when we come to the book of the Acts of the Apostles, very especially, we see the emerging new man, that Jesus Christ promised in the very initial stages of his encounter with Peter, that he would ultimately be.

You remember those words recorded in chapter 1 of John's Gospel? So you, Simon, son of Jonas, you shall be called Peter. And Peter means something quite different from Simon. Whatever the precise significance of the two names, they are certainly as different as chalk from cheese.

Simon is going to be transformed into a new man, and that man is going to be a man of rock, stable, firm, strong in spirit to serve his Lord. Now, it is when we cross over from the closing words of the Gospels into the book of the Acts of the Apostles that we see this new image appearing. We certainly see the beginnings of that in this very remarkable second chapter in the book of the Acts of the Apostles.

The aspect of the new man that we are going to be concerned with today comes out under the title we have given, The Holy Spirit and Peter's Personality. What we see here in substance is the way in which the Spirit of God dealt with the individual man, Simon Peter, and so changed him and transformed him and then graced him, that he was not only able to take his place in the community, but able to fulfill his mission there. Not simply able to become a member of the church, but to take his place as a member and as a leader, and within the fellowship of that Christian community to do exactly what God had planned for him.

Now this is grace. This is nothing short of the grace of God. And it is to this that we turn this morning.

Now I am not therefore basing the message this morning on any particular text. I suppose if we were asked to take any one text more than another, I would refer you to the opening words of verse 14. The Peter standing up with the eleven.

Now I think there is more there than a statement that Peter and the eleven were standing together in a group. That is true, they were. They were shoulder to shoulder, man to man, in the battle for the gospel.

But there is more to it than that. They were not simply standing shoulder to shoulder, but they stood heart with heart. Soul knitted to soul.

They stood as one man in the fellowship which the Spirit had brought about and the word of the gospel. In other words, here is an integrated, united, concerted effort to move forward in the way of the Lord. Our Lord's last few days on earth, ere he ascended to the Father, were days of very mixed feelings, we believe, for the community that he was going to leave behind.

Of course they knew that their Lord had not died in vain. Because they had seen him, they knew that he was risen from the dead. And the resurrection assured them that the death of Calvary was not the unmitigated tragedy that they once thought it to be.

He was risen. But there were many questions. They were still perplexed by the fact that he had announced earlier on that he was going away, he was going to leave them, and that this was to their profit.

Now had he simply said, I'm going away, well, that would have been bad, as far as they were concerned, in their present understanding of things. But he insisted that it was to their profit that he should leave them. And this, of course, was mystifying.

And then, over and above all that, he had told them exactly what they were to do. They were to be witnesses, even to the uttermost parts of the earth, but beginning at Jerusalem. They were to make disciples of all nations and so forth.

You remember that he had told them exactly what they were to do, in terms of mission. And they felt so impotent, so utterly incapable, even of setting out upon that ministry. Now it was not without reason, therefore, that our Lord commanded them to remain in Jerusalem until, as he put it, you shall receive the promise of the Father, about which I have talked so much.

He spoke of it as the promise of the Father, which you have heard of me, Acts 1-4. Then he proceeded to describe it as their being baptized with the Holy Spirit. And then, in verse 8 of this first chapter of Acts, as their reception of power.

He shall receive power. After that, the Holy Spirit comes upon you. Then, in due course, the event took place.

The day of Pentecost arrived. And with the arrival of the day came the Spirit of God down upon that ancient community in a manner which was wholly singular and unique. Down he came.

I'm not going into the details this morning, but what I do want us to notice again is this, that when he came down, the promise of power was fulfilled. Now, we have considered one aspect of that power already. Namely, the power of the Spirit over Peter's mouth or Peter's tongue.

It wasn't, of course, exclusively Peter's experience. It was the experience of the whole community. The Holy Spirit of God controlled their organ of speech.

This is our most remarkable thing. It's only the grace of God and the power of God can do this. You and I know what an unruly thing the tongue is.

How many lives bear marks and wounds here this morning because of other people's tongues. But the mighty power of God came upon Peter, came upon his friends, and one thing that took place was this, their mouths, their tongues, their lips came under divine control. So that what they said, they said as the Spirit required it.

The way they said it, they said it as the Spirit required it. So that at one moment they could speak in this language, in another, in yet another language. But the point to notice is this, not the languages that were used, but the control of the Spirit, the power of the Spirit over men and women's mouths and tongues and lips.

But now, the Holy Spirit's power was not to be confined to his control of men's tongues, however mighty, however significant and far-reaching that was, first of all for that community there in Jerusalem, and for the remaining of the Church's history. But the Spirit's power is equally evident in this, that he is able to deal with the several individuals that comprise that community and fit their personalities so that they can take their place in the community. We, of course, have a special interest in Peter, but what we're saying is true of all of them.

It is almost unbelievable the way in which these folk were fused into what we so glibly call a fellowship, a communion, in which heart beat with heart, mind thought with mind, and their wills were all under subjection to the holy, perfect will of God. Neither is this powerful ministry of the Spirit any the less important than the power evidenced in the gift of tongues which he imparted to the members of that church. You see, the ability to communicate the good news in other tongues that we have in the day of Pentecost, all that could have come to nothing had the early Christian community began to quarrel among themselves, had they started bickering and bantering and dividing and arguing, something which is so often met in the Christian church.

I say to you that the whole message of Pentecost preached in many tongues could have come to naught were it not for the power of the Spirit dealing with this personality and that individual and blending them and making them into one cohesive organ for God to work through. Now this is especially, especially relevant to Peter because Peter's personality was not an easy one, not easy for other people to get on with. We've seen this all along the way.

Pardon me for having to refer to some of these very basic passages again this morning. He was an individualist. He was a man who was impetuous.

He acted first and then he thought afterwards. Peter never saw other people's feet, never thought of other people's cons, he just stepped on them. He was a man like that.

He was a rough, rugged individual. He just instinctively acted and if he saw that he wanted to get there, doesn't matter who's in the way, away he goes. That's Simon Peter.

Now I say to you that to get a man like that to fit into the community and to fulfill his mission without hurting other people, no, not negatively without hurting other people, but in the process of becoming what God meant him to be, to bring others with him that they may all grow in grace and in the knowledge of God, is token of nothing short of sheer divine power. So what we have before us this morning then is the power of the Holy Spirit dealing with men's personality. Now my good people, before we go any further, let us say this.

Our interest in this is not purely historical. I suppose it would deserve our attention as history. But our interest in this is very practical.

You see, you and I belong to a church. You know the kind of temperament that you have. You know how you get on with people.

There may be someone in this church this morning you don't like looking at, you never sat with. I want to tell you that there is an answer to that and that a real koinonia of God can emerge even where people have been opposite to one another. But it is only by the Holy Spirit's grace and power.

He can fit Peter, the most difficult character, into the fellowship so that Peter comes to himself, as it were, and matures spiritually. And at the same time, all those around him grow in grace and in the knowledge of God in Christ. Now this is power.

I want to say three things this morning and though we're concentrating upon Peter we have to look at the others as well. The first thing is this. The Holy Spirit enabled Peter so to master his personality or should I say his personality problems that he became integrated into the community of believers.

Now this is the basic thing. We'll move on from there afterwards. The Holy Spirit enabled Peter so to master his personality problems or idiosyncrasies that he became integrated to the Christian community.

He did not simply have his name on the list. I don't suppose they had a list. But he belonged.

He belonged to them and they belonged to him. And this is what Christian fellowship is all about. You know, it's one thing to have our membership on the roll of a church, but that's not what it's all about.

Christian fellowship is something way beyond this. It is that those within the fellowship belong to one another. We say that the Lord is ours and we are his.

Well now that's wonderful. But Christian fellowship implies this also. You are mine and I am yours in Christ.

And we don't know anything about it until we get there. Until we can look into the faces of one another, those whose names are on the roll and we say to one another in Christ, as honest as the day, man,

woman in Christ, I'm yours. And you're mine.

So then I would say that there is more to this 14th verse in Acts 2 than a statement that they were physically together. Geographically in the same place. They were more than that.

Their hearts were in it. Their minds were under the sway of divine truth and they were under the sovereign control of the Holy Spirit. Now just a moment's thought.

This matter of becoming integrated in a community is a two-sided affair. It makes demands upon the incoming individual and upon those that are there to receive him. The two sides.

Upon the individual and the community of which he is becoming a part. There must be considerable give and take on both sides. And especially so when that community is as yet in its infancy as the church here in Jerusalem was.

And when it had so recently passed through the emotionally traumatic experiences related to the crucifixion of our Lord. You see they were somewhat emotionally tense still. Oh how much give and take there has to be if the membership is to become a fellowship.

Be it to the everlasting credit of that early community that they learned to receive Peter. To receive Peter as one of their members despite his history of bluster and failure. Now mark this.

No one knew the failure and the blustering nature of Peter better than these folk. They'd lived with him for the best part of three and a half years. It was on their cons that he had so often stepped.

He'd been such a nuisance along the way. They had been a thousand times hurt by his awkward words and awkward ways. I sometimes think that their task was not unlike that of trying to fit a completely outrageous stone into a building such as this.

You imagine yourself trying to build a wall and all the stones are very much of the same size. But then there comes one mammoth, rough, rugged, untuned stone, untrimmed. And you try to fit that into a wall.

Peter was a man like that. He wasn't made to measure. He wasn't exactly like anybody else.

He was rough. He was himself. He was an individual.

Very much so. Now how to fit him into the community? Looked at from Peter's side, the task was no less challenging. He knew how his tongue could get out of control.

He knew himself how often he acted out of turn. I'm sure he'd had the same kind of thing happen when he was on the boat fishing. I'm sure there must have been lacerated spirits among those who joined him.

But you see, now, he and his fellows are right in the center of the picture. Everybody's looking on. There are more people around in the team, as it were.

It's not just two or three on a fishing boat. There's a crowd and they're all so different. And the eyes of all are focused upon this group.

I say to you, it must have been very difficult for Peter to become integrated and to become part of this community. But God be praised. God be praised.

However different they were, however varied in temperament and personality and make of this, that, and the other, however varied they were, the Spirit of God so came upon them and so gave them power that these men were able to control themselves. The fact is that up until Pentecost, these followers of our Lord were very much unitary believers. Of course, they were together in the sense that they were all following the same Lord, listening to the same teaching, coming under the same influence.

And he would have put them into the same category as followers or disciples of Jesus Christ. But they were very much each man for himself. Sometimes two or three of them would act together.

At other times they would be sent out two by two. But despite all that, you see the marks of individuality very strongly here. But at Pentecost, something new came into existence.

What characterizes the Church after Pentecost is not each man for himself, but each for other. They were now an organism. Not like beads on a string, all on the same string, but not related, not fused the one into the other.

But they were now like branches of the vine. They shared the same life. And they belonged together part-wise and head-wise and in every other sense.

Indeed, they even brought their material goods and fooled them. You see, whatever you make of that, it meant that they belonged to one another. This was fellowship.

If I may put it in terms of Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones, not only were the bones now brought closely together as Ezekiel puts it, bone to its bone. That's marvelous. Each person fitting into his proper place, bone to its bone.

But the whole body was animated by the one Holy Spirit. They had the same life. And they belonged to one another.

Just like the members of the physical body belonged one to the other, they became an organism. My good friends, do we know anything of this? I guess this morning, and I hope you don't get cross with me for saying this, I guess most of us are members of the Church. We've got our names on the register somewhere.

We've been received unofficially somewhere. My friend, I have a question to ask you. It is far more relevant than that.

More basic, more fundamental. Do you belong to the saints? Do you belong? Do you belong? Just as my hand belongs to my arm and my arm to my body, do you belong to the saints? Is there a political group, for example, to which you belong more than to the Church? Or any other entity in life to which you belong? I say to you, if that is so, then your alleged Christian experience needs to be scrutinized very, very carefully. Peter, by the grace of God and the power of the Spirit, was able to master his personality problems and idiosyncrasies in such a manner that even he felt himself to be one of, to belong to, the community.

Secondly, the Spirit's power enabled Peter to assume his destined role of leadership without causing a rupture of the fellowship. Now this takes us further on a little along the road. Simon Peter was not simply called to be a member of the Christian Church.

He was that. But he was called to be a leader. And he was both naturally endowed and spiritually equipped to serve the Church of Jesus Christ.

But you see, a crucial question is this. Can such a man as Peter win the confidence of his fellows so that they concede to him the place of leadership without bringing harm and despise to the fellowship? Has he got a rule with a rod of iron and impose himself as God's man upon the people? Or is there some way whereby the people can recognize him as the man who has been called to leadership and concede to him honorably and gratefully the position to which God called him? Now the answer to that question, of course, is clear. This kind of thing can only take place by the power of the Spirit of God upon Peter himself and upon the community.

And what we have here, of course, is the token and the evidence of the fact that the Spirit's power was so mighty upon them all. The other eleven looked up and they saw Yeshua as God's man. And they conceded him the place that was his due.

And Simon Peter did not override or roughly ride over them but dealt with them as the Lord's people, his sheep, his lamb. Be it to the eternal glory of that initial nucleus of believers then that they recognized Peter's gifts and calling as surely as they saw his faults. Now I have to repeat.

If anyone was aware of Peter's faults these were the people because they'd lived with him for over three years. Therefore, you see, you know what happens if people do anything wrong in your eyes. Those wrongs, those faults, those sins, they linger on and so often you can't see those people again through your concept of their faults and feebleness and sins and waywardness.

Now you see, had that happened here Peter would never have been leader. Never. They were there.

They knew how he denounced his Lord and denied him. They knew how he blasphemed. They knew how all along the way Peter had been a stumbling block and Jesus had to say to him, get thee behind me, Satan.

They knew the arrogance of this man. They knew the impetuosity of this man. They knew his faults.

And therefore, you see, on the natural plane one can almost imagine it's not necessary natural for the other people to stake their claims to leadership. After all, they didn't go the length that he did. None of them cursed and swore and said three times over we don't know the person you're talking about.

None of them. Peter did. But the same disciples also heard Jesus reinstate Simon.

Most of them, if not all of them, were there around that charcoal fire by the side of the Sea of Galilee and they heard the same Lord of the church say to him Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? And when Simon was able to acknowledge that he had some measure of real affection for the Savior three times over Jesus said to him, right Simon, I've not abandoned you but I'm reiterating take charge of my sheep and the lambs and feed my sheep. In other words, I'm reinstating you. Now, this is where grace comes in, you see.

They knew Simon's faults. They knew Simon's sins. And yet they allowed the calling of God to override every other consideration and did not stand in the way of Simon becoming their leader because the Lord had placed him there.

This is unnecessary grace in the life of a church. It is so possible to allow people's faults to blind us to everything else. I was reading the other day about Martin Luther.

It comes out so clearly in him. Now, this is not the picture we have of Luther from some people nowadays. Luther is anything but good, according to people.

And there was great grace upon that great man and we thank God for him from this pulpit this morning and I trust from the pew. One of the great facets of Martin Luther's understanding and spiritual perception lies here. He knew what God had called him to do and he set out to do that.

Though there be as many devils in worms as there are tiles on the housetops, he'll go to worms. But the same Martin Luther will not try to do what belongs to someone else. Now, this is the quote.

Philip Melanchthon was a great scholar, far greater than Luther, and probably a far more charming man. If the two came in here this morning and appeared before you, I have no doubt that all of us would fall for Philip Melanchthon. He was such a perfect gentleman.

You know, he would capture everybody. It doesn't matter what your background is. He was that type of man.

Martin Luther was rough. If he knew your faults, your sins, and mine, he would probably tell us face to face. He would not hold his punches.

He was a little bit of John the Baptist. But now this is what Martin Luther said. I, he said, was born to be a rough controversialist.

I clear the ground. I like this humility, you know. I clear the ground.

I was called to pull up the weeds, to fill up the ditches, and to smooth the roads for the royal carriage. But to build, and to plan, and to sow, and to water, and to adorn the country for God belongs by the grace of God to Philip Melanchthon. That's exactly what we have here.

There were times when Martin Luther might have been jealous of Melanchthon because of his popularity. But no, no, no, no, no. He saw the grace of God in Melanchthon, the calling of God in Melanchthon, and he knew what he was called to do.

So he was satisfied with his own and acknowledged God's calling to his brother. That's exactly what we have here. Even Simon Peter was given this grace.

As you, as we acknowledge the power and grace of the Spirit in the early church, conceding his place to Peter, let us not miss the complimentary gift in him. I see him standing with the eleven, not apart from them, not preaching down at them, not separating himself from them as the leader standing on a pedestal. No, no.

He is actually carrying them with him, winning their confidence so that what is done by the one is done in the name of the whole body, and they are behind him as he is with them. You see, at last, something big has taken place. The impetuous, proud, arrogant Peter has been mustered for God.

Thus, Peter fulfilled his role of leadership without disturbing the fellowship. He carried them with him. He won them over, and they were won.

My good friends, what a different story the history of the Christian church would make if the Spirit of God had been as evident at all times. Lastly, the Spirit enabled Peter to break away from his native timidity and pass forward toward his appointed destiny. I don't know how you find it, but I find myself, as you will have noticed from these sermons, I find myself always remembering some of Peter's thoughts.

Some of them always come to mind. But there are some things in Peter which we strangely forget, even sometimes don't recognize. I was amazed, after spending quite a little time in studying gospel narratives as they present the story and the picture of Simon Peter, I was amazed how I had missed, for example, one very, very obvious trait, when you look back upon it, in Peter's life, namely, his native timidity, a streak of fear.

Have you noticed it? Now, it may well be this morning that when I say this, it strikes some of you as being not true to fact. Well, now you read the gospels again. I want to say to you that despite all the blustering of Peter and despite all the apparently courageous things he did, most of those courageous deeds were wrought out of sheer impetuosity, instinctively rather than thoughtfully, because underneath all that there were basic fears.

Yes, the very man who has been called the big fisherman was afraid of certain things, overwhelmed by the phenomena of his talkativeness and impetuous activity. We find it difficult to recognize this perhaps, but you know, this is not the first time that a man has been quick in action and quick to speak, only to cover up a basic fear. Now, this is true.

When there are people in church or people in committees or anywhere else, and you know, they're always quick out, they're like a gun, they're off. Be careful. Sometimes they're very torrent of words, hides of fear, and something else as well, maybe.

Well, it was true of Peter. Without now enlarging upon the details, let me just remind you of a threefold fear which the Gospels relate to. And they're also very relevant to his fulfillment of his ministry and his destiny.

First of all, Peter was afraid of drowning. Afraid of drowning. If you remember the story, it's in Matthew 14.

Now, I'm not concerned with all the details. A little group had been caught in a storm on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was not with them.

He was watching, he was praying on the slopes over there, and he could see them in the moonlight, he could see them toiling and rowing, and at long last, when they thought they couldn't cope, the Lord Jesus in sovereign power walked on the waves and made towards them. They were there caught in this little boat, heaving upwards and downwards at the mercy of the sea and its storm. And then they saw this unrecognized figure at first coming towards them, and my, their fears were doubled.

What's this ghost figure coming near to us? And he, out of the grace of his heart, said, it's all right, it's me, it is I. Simon Peter, impetuous as usual and always the first to speak, said, well, Lord, if it is you, let me put you to the test. You see, if he'd thought about this, he'd never have done it. But impetuous, he said it.

Look, Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water and enable me to do the same kind of thing as you can do. And the Lord said, come. And Peter, without thinking, of course, walked out, out in obedience to his Lord's command.

And believe it or not, Peter was able to walk on the sea like his Lord until he saw the waves. And he took his eyes away from his Lord and his heart away from his Lord and his faith away from his Lord. And he was beginning to sink.

But he's a fisherman. He's a swimmer. He's a man of the sea.

Surely Peter has mustered all fear of the briny ocean or the Sea of Galilee? Not at all. Save me, he says, like a baby in the water. I'm sinking.

He was afraid to sink, afraid of drowning. May I give you another fear of his? Not only was he afraid of drowning, he was afraid of the deriding of others. Very familiar scene.

It's the high priest's courtyard. Peter has followed afar off, and he's got there just after his Lord. And as the high priest and his puppets are attending to the cross-examination of the Lord Jesus on that fateful night, Simon is in the other courtyard.

And you remember how a little girl comes in and says, well, weren't you also with them? Peter denied three times. Why? You know, basically because he was afraid of their derision. There may have been other factors involved here, but I suggest to you that basically he was a man who couldn't take people laughing at him.

He couldn't stand, he couldn't face the mob laughing and having a good time. What, you, the follower of a man who is now at the mercy of the leaders, who's soon been nailed to a cross? You, a follower of his? He couldn't take it. Afraid of drowning, afraid of derision.

And of course he was afraid of declaring the unpalatable truth when it ought to be declared. That is up until this point. That is brought out in John chapter 20, verse 19, when joining others on that first day of the week when Jesus was risen.

We read that they were in the room when the doors were shut for fear of the Jews. They knew that their Lord was risen. They knew it.

They knew it. And imagine Simon Peter, who knew that his Lord was risen, this big, burly man. He was afraid to declare it.

What will happen to us if we go out into the streets of Jerusalem at this time and tell the Jews that the one they nailed on the cross is the Lord of glory risen from the dead? He was afraid, you see. But that fear was to be short-lived when the spirit of Pentecost came upon him and his family. Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you.

I see the doors opening and I see the community moving out into the streets of Jerusalem, careless now of what might happen, be it drowning, be it dying, be it cross, be it anything. Life has assumed something entirely different now. Whether in life or in death, they are at their Lord's disposal.

Fear of man and fear of death has gone. How to move forward with destiny. Men and women, what has God called you to? I wonder whether there is someone here this morning who is laboring under an awful burden.

God has called you to something. And you're afraid to move forward. Don't be ashamed of it for a moment.

Peter was, too, during the days of his training. But when the Spirit of God filled him, he went out. Not like Abram, not knowing whither he went because the Lord had told him that one day he would be bound and would be martyred.

But he lived under that shadow henceforth by the power of the Spirit and marched forward to his destiny. Now the word with which I must close is this. The Holy Spirit of God has not changed.

Hallelujah. Our God is the great I Am. And the Holy Spirit is the great I Am.

And it matters not what your need and mine may be for you this morning. He is able to enable us to fulfill our destiny and our calling. He is able to deal with us and to chop off the rugged edges that we may fit into the community.

He is able to make leaders assume leadership without destroying the fellowship. He is able to make us strong to move forward to our destiny. Despite all the fears and tyranny that may have broken our hearts and silenced our tongues in days that are gone, therefore we can only end in one place.

Oh, Spirit of God, take control of us. Will you pray that? Is your heart open this morning? Are all the windows of the temple of your soul open towards Jerusalem? Not open to receive anything from any evil spirit that may be abroad, but open in the name of Jesus for anything that God has, that God has. In other words, you and I prepare to be under the control of the Spirit for there will be no victory save insofar as we are under His control.

Ride on, ride on in thou spirit of the Lord. Rule every territory here within this heart. Let us pray.

Oh Lord, we pray thee to lead us on, to teach us, making us teachable at every turn of the road that the gospel we declare from thy word may also be the gospel whose power we experience within our hearts and within our fellowship. Mold us. Transform us.

Deal with the oddities that belong to all of us that we see in others but rarely in ourselves and make of us such a holy communion of saints that this shall be an outpost of the heavenly Jerusalem, a place where the King dwells in His beauty and in His glory. Amen.

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