

# Indigenous Principles

by William MacDonald

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of indigenous churches that are self-governing, self-financing, and self-propagating, and highlights the need to train national leaders to lead the church in the future.*

**Duration:** 43:46

**Scripture:** Ephesians 4:7, Ephesians 4:9-12

**Topics:** "Indigenous"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on indigenous principles and the importance of empowering local believers in spreading the gospel. He references Ephesians 4:7, which states that each believer is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. The speaker also mentions Psalm 139, where David refers to himself being curiously wrought in the lower parts of the earth, which the speaker interprets as the virgin's womb. He highlights the need for churches to be self-sustaining and not rely solely on foreign missionaries, emphasizing that missionaries can teach and mobilize nationals, but the nationals themselves can reach the unsaved in a unique way. The speaker praises the example of Paul in Thessalonica, where he preached the gospel, established a church, and raised up local leaders.

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## Transcript

Would you turn in your Bibles tonight to Ephesians chapter 4 what I would just like to do is have a quiet talk with you about Indigenous principles Things that you already know, but it's good to Stir up our pure minds by way of remembrance, I think Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 7 Ephesians 4 and 7 but unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ Wherefore he saith or wherefore it saith the book of Psalms when he ascended up on high he led captivity Captive and gave gifts unto men Now that he ascended what is it, but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth And incidentally, I read I understand that expression the lower parts of the earth to refer to the Virgin's womb David uses a similar expression doesn't he in Psalm? 139 when he speaks of himself as having been curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth Where was he born underground?

Not at all born from his mother's womb and I think what this passage of Scripture is saying is that that the risen ascended Lord Jesus Christ gave gifts to men Risen ascended. How could he ascend he had been in heaven from all eternity Oh, it presupposes a prior descent doesn't it? And that descent was in Incarnation he first descended into the lower parts of the earth Descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens that he might fill all things and he gave some Apostles and some prophets and

some evangelists and some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the Saints Eliminate the comma if it's in your version It's not for the Perfecting of the Saints comma under the work of the ministry comma unto the edifying of the body of Christ It's for the perfecting of the Saints unto the work of the ministry Under the edifying the building up of the body of Christ till we all come in The unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man unto the measure of the stature of the Fullness of Christ that we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the slight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie and wait to deceive but Speaking the truth and love may grow up into him in all things which is the head even Christ from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplier According to the effectual working and the measure of every part make an increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love I Can never read this passage of Scripture without going back in memory to? the Hawaiian Islands during the Second World War when God was having real dealings in my life and The question came to be why do you meet the way the people in the so-called assemblies meet?

Are you in the assemblies because your father was in them and because he made you go to them or are you in them by? personal conviction But I said, okay that settles it I'm going to the Word of God and see what the word I'm going to the Word of God and see if I would be Just as happy in a denominational church the usual clergy laity Relationship and so I did I started in the Word of God to gain convictions for myself and I really believe the Spirit of God led me to Ephesians chapter 4 and When I saw that in Ephesians chapter 4 that the gifts were given For the perfecting of the Saints unto the work of the ministry Under the edifying of the body of Christ I thought the principles are really divine the principles that I have been used to are really divine.

I saw that there was no place in the Word of God for the distinction between clergy and laity and I saw that the world will never be evangelized as long as we have a clerical system The God's program is to see the Saints Built up for the work of the ministry.

That's what it's going to take. Isn't it every member? Evangelism I was reading from Hudson Taylor the other day and I came across this. I think it's quite good He said in a parent in a letter to his parents dated July 1873 he wrote the work is steadily growing especially in that most Important department native help the helpers are becoming more efficient as well as more numerous and the future Hope for China lies doubtless in them.

I look on foreign missionaries as the Scaffolding round a rising building the sooner it can be dispensed with the better or rather The sooner it can be transferred to other places to serve the same Temporary purpose a few months later He again wrote I am aiming at such organization of our forces as will enable us to do more work with fewer foreign missionaries by the more thorough training of our Native helpers. Well that rather thrilled me to read that excerpt from Hudson Taylor Because I had the joy of a brief visit in China last October And you know, I believe that some of the most beautiful Indigenous churches in the world today are in China If you'd like to read a very excellent book get a hold of a book called the church in China by Karl Lawrence and it will thrill your soul Actually, there are two types of churches in China today. There's what is called the three self help Patriotic movement that is the official government church That is the church that's under the thumb of the government There are many true believers in those churches many true believers that have just chosen to go that way While I'm speaking about that church that free self-help patriotic movement I might just say that the Chinese government recently printed 1 million Bibles and Distributes them through that church incredible People say why would the Chinese government do that? I don't know But I know God often causes men to do things that naturally they wouldn't do He did it

with Balaam didn't he Balaam said some wonderful things.

He didn't want to say them, but God overruled Well in addition to that, of course, there's what is known as the underground church And there are millions of believers in China today In fact, it's absolutely thrilling to read about it and Karl. I don't know Karl Lawrence I don't know who he is, but in almost naivete He says that the wonderful thing is that these churches don't have resident pastors They have itinerant evangelists who move around the countryside and visit them But the church is vibrant the church is on fire for the Lord I believe Hudson Taylor would be thrilled If he could know what's going on in China today, maybe he does know Under those circuit, it's interesting that even in the free self-help patriotic movement The government wants churches that are self-governing self propagating and self-financing Self-financing Interesting, isn't it that a worldly government?

Would latch on to those things they want the church to develop a long Chinese line How many a truth was spoken between false teeth? Hmm, and I think you have an illustration of that there I mean if they're right give them credit for it I hope I don't shock you when I say this But I think one of the worst things that could happen in China today would be an influx of Western missionaries I really do it would change the whole character of the work there and take away from it that beautiful Indigenous character that it has today Now I think we have a responsibility to pray for those dear Christians I brought back with me a picture of a dear young brother who traveled five days on a train From Urumqi up in the north down to Canton in order to be baptized I'll tell you a lot of people in the United States wouldn't cross the street to be baptized Would they he traveled five days in an uncomfortable train from the north down to the south just to be baptized What do we mean when we talk about indigenous churches?

Well, I think the best synonym I would know for indigenous is Native native We speak of orchids as being indigenous to Hawaii But not to Alaska You know Orchids just flourish out there in the Hawaiian Islands. They don't do well in Alaska or in Siberia and when we speak of that in connection with the churches, we we say that we want churches to Follow New Testament principle to be empowered by the Spirit of God, but to be self-governing Self-financing self-propagating I Think you see it in the life of the Apostle Paul and and that's really a throwing thing to go back to the New Testament The book of Acts and the epistles and see Paul at work there going into an area Preaching the gospel in the power of the Spirit of God He was a man who was radioactive with the Spirit of God and When he preached things happened for God the old English bishop said Everywhere Paul went he started a revolution Everywhere I go they served me tea well everywhere Paul when he did start a revolution and things happen and and Souls were saved and then he would teach them the great truths of the of the Word of God with regard to the church And with regard to other things of the next thing, you know a church Came into being an assembly came into being thrilling.

I Always marvel over Thessalonica, don't you? Paul going into that Greek community It was really pretty primitive Territory as far as the gospel was concerned, but he preached And he preached in power and his life backed up his preaching. He said that to them You know what manner of men we were among you for your sake They first saw Christ in Paul And the next thing, you know, there's a church. There's an assembly there in Thessalonica And as the Spirit of God is given opportunity to raise up elders as leaders there they're raised up and They're recognized and Paul advises and Paul moves on great Really great Paul was not a resident pastor abroad fuzzy He was not a resident pastor abroad As someone has said he was a goer not a stayer William Dillon said something.

He said a successful foreign missionary is never replaced by a foreign missionary Well, that may be a little extreme that statement but it has shock value makes you sit up and think a Successful Foreign missionary is never replaced by a foreign missionary So Paul went the longest Paul ever stayed in one place at a time was two years in Ephesus During his total ministry. He was there for three years But at any one time the longest he stayed was two years in Ephesus He's nice to have him here at the conference have him. Tell us how he did it Under God a lot of us would like to know more about that.

I'm sure But he did he set up assemblies that were really Self-governing you see that for instance in the book of Titus and I always get a special thrill out of this Paul is telling Titus what the Cretan people were like. He said they're they're liars He said they're evil beasts he said they're idle gluttons That's what they were naturally apart from the grace of God But the grace of God comes into Crete and these men are saved in the very very same chapter Paul says I want you to ordain elders. I'll tell you there's something thrilling about that, isn't there when you can take such unpromising raw material and And see it transformed by the grace of God and these men becoming functioning elders in a in the midst of Place like that Yes, the local assembly the local fellowship should be self-governing It's not to be governed by a foreign Missionary and frankly, it's not to be governed by a national worker or by national workers paid by foreign missionaries And in the course remarks that I will be thinking of some of the abuses I could just pause here and say that I think the American dollar has done and is doing more harm in the mission field than any other single thing I can think of and it's not purposeful because the American people are generous and the American people are gullible and It's just causing a lot of problems on the mission field today Self-governing assemblies of plurality of Elders and you know, the wonderful thing is that these principles are good for any Place in the world.

I'll never forget visiting in some of the most remote parts of Italy We went up to a mountain town there. There was a huge Catholic Hospital made of Italian marble There was a famous priest there named Padre Pio and he had supposedly had these marks in his hands that bled at periodic intervals the stigmata, they're known and Padre Pio, of course wore gloves all the time Nobody ever saw his hands and the people would say isn't that a mark of his genuine humility that he wears? Gloves well right in that same place where Padre Pio was carrying on It was a little assembly of believers and these dear men going out into the fields at Sun up in the morning and coming home at sundown at night working hard in the fields all day I want to tell you something they knew the Word of God and they could minister the Word of God and they could speak in the power of the Holy Spirit of God and they could see more on their knees than Padre Pio could see on his tiptoes and I said to myself praise God for New Testament Church principles Because I saw them in operation and I saw that they were and they could those people couldn't have hired a pastor They couldn't have built a church. They didn't have money for either a pastor or a church building But I'll tell you they were functioning to the glory of God.

I'd love to get back there I felt so much at home with those dear Christians there That's the goal, isn't it? What a monument to leave behind I can't think of anything greater The greater monument to leave behind then New Testament assemblies Going on brightly for the Lord Jesus and on the foreign field able to carry on without foreign personnel at all It's good, it's good when the Nationals can handle disciplinary matters, isn't it? A Disciplinary problems come up, of course all the time in situations like this And some of you know from firsthand experience that if the foreign worker Handles it oftentimes there's grudges among the Christians against him because of it He's acting against one of their own It's like the Arab proverb that says I and my brother against my cousin But the next part of the problem Proverbs says I and my brother and my cousin against an outsider Hmm. I think that tells the story I and my brother against my cousin We

have the privilege of fighting one another if we want I and my brother and my cousin against an outsider And it's nearly that's what's happening in Lebanon today, isn't it? That's the whole story of Lebanon today and Will be for days to come It's good good when the Nationals themselves are trained and are able with an open Bible to handle the disciplinary problem It's good when the Nationals themselves Administer the Lord's Supper as it were and decide on the forms of service But I really believe this that these Indigenous principles must be introduced from the very beginning of the work. I think that the Nationals have the Right to know from the very beginning the form that the work is going to take They will rise to the occasion and it's really these principle is just as important in this country the same principles apply In our assemblies we have to be constantly Thinking about the training of younger men to take over the leadership of the assemblies I was rather thrilled two years ago I was in Israel and two of the brothers came to me to the leading brothers in Israel and they said brother bill They said we're not going to be here much longer We're passing off the scene and they said we want to see God raise up leaders for the work here in Israel They said 15 years ago, there were only 200 Jewish believers in all of Israel today there were 2,000 they said We want to do something about it.

And so it was arranged that in July of this year We would have a leadership training conference there where the young men of Israel could come together and have a whole month of Intensive leadership training you might pray for that would really appreciate your prayers I think it's something very significant for the land of Israel what a joy to be there with those dear young people many of them come in with their army uniforms they'll come in in uniform with a machine gun in their hand or whatever the gun is and Then they'll go upstairs and change and come down and attend the meetings But those men had a burden To see leadership strong spiritual leadership raised up for the work in Israel in indigenous churches, there should be a Self-financing The assembly should be independent of foreign support and then there can be no question about That assembly or the work being an agent of a foreign power Workers should be supported by the national believers.

Well, a lot of them don't like this I was in a country in the Orient and a brother said to me He said brother McDonald we Christian workers here do not want to be supported by our local assemblies We want to be supported from the United States And then he said to me, what do you think of that? I said, I think it's the worst thing that could happen He said well, why would you say that it was rather offended that I would be so negative I said my dear brother 60 miles north of us The communist forces, right?

Well, we were talking the communists were lined up 60 miles north of us I said supposing someday they should just cross over that line and come down here whose heads Do you think would be the first to fall? The heads of those supported by imperialist dollars, that's who He didn't appreciate it And he may have been the same man who said to a brother who's sitting in the meeting tonight We want your money, but we don't want you Pretty straight talk, isn't it? actually in that country American dollars have flowed in such a way that the people the Christian people of that country have developed a beggar Mentality and the work is not Indigenous in the truest sense of the word too bad, isn't it?

Too bad that a situation like that could ever exist. They say well our people are so poor That we couldn't support a national worker Well, I'll tell you how it is if there are ten families in that assembly and ten families tithe They could support one National worker on the same economic level as themselves just as easy as that Let me say that again If there are only ten families in that fellowship and most of them have far more than that and each of those families would tithe They could support one national worker on the same economic level as themselves He would be supported on a comparable basis buildings For meeting should be designed built and owned by the nationals and financed by national funds years ago There was

a very dear Christian brother in Kathmandu Nepal and He may he he was brought by loving Americans over to this country I don't think he ever got even got further than the East Coast and the churches there lavished him with money and he went back and and this dear man had had served prison sentences for baptizing believers in Kathmandu and He went back and they built this tremendous edifice in downtown Kathmandu and it just shrieks America The only thing indigenous about it is that they don't have chairs or pews they sit on the floor is the only thing But it almost make you sick to see it It was so out of place.

It was so bizarre it was so incongruous to see that kind of an edifice in a country like Kathmandu and especially in The city the capital city And so there are tremendous abuses today through the wrongful use of money Years ago. I was in Amman Jordan And there's a wonderful missionary brother there in Amman. His name is Roy Whitman.

Some of you may know him I don't think I ever see his name in any of the magazines But down through the years Roy Whitman has done a marvelous job for God raising up indigenous Assembly he speaks Arabic so well that the Arabs like to come just to hear him speak They're so impressed by his Arabic and down through the years. He's seen these assemblies built up He's seen under God. He's seen elders raised up men proficient in the Word of God men living godly line Then what happened? Well, I'll tell you what happens American evangelical denominations go over there and they want to start a church in Jordan so they go to one of these elders and They offer him a salary that would be comparable.

That is something that they'd be getting in the United States terrible almost cruel almost inhumane and Many many times it's just been too much of a temptation for those dear men And so they leave that assembly and they go to pastor denominational church and I admire Roy Whitman Never said a word he just flawed on God has vindicated that man over the years If it were me, I think I could have dipped my pen in acid and written out a few well-chosen words, but not Roy Whitman That's hard When God has used you to raise up these lovely assemblies Something similar that to that happened in Nazareth Israel some of you have been to Nazareth probably visited the little assembly there Harry and best Negro used to work there and then God called Harry home best came back to the United States and the assembly functions as an indigenous Arab assembly Well, there was another denomination that wanted to start a work there in Nazareth And they came over not even to an elder Just to one of the brothers in the assembly. They say come be our pastor We'll pay you and I don't know what the salary was maybe ten thousand dollars or something which would make him a millionaire comparably in that country And So he went and he became the pastor of that local church in Nazareth Well, the interesting thing is when the Arabs when the unsaved Arabs in Nazareth when they passed that church, they say the American Church Because it's financed by American dollars now that might sound good to you the American church that doesn't sound good to them I'll tell you this they don't say that when they pass the building where the assembly meets It's an indigenous Assembly, it's governed by some of their own countrymen by their own neighbors And it's financed by their own neighbors and it's propagated by their own neighbors as well Years ago in Laos There was a national worker Supported from the United States one of the denominations in the United States And he was getting more money than the governor of the province How do you think that went over with the authority? Not very well Not very well And I wouldn't think his longevity would be very great in the succeeding years. I Don't know how it finally came out But he a Simple Christian worker getting more money than the governor of the province.

I mean years ago I was in Rome and I visited the Bible school in Rome and they asked me if I'd come and teach And I looked around there weren't any students. I began to wonder who I teach And I said what's the story about the students? They said well Italian young people want to be paid to come to Bible school

They've been bitten by a fox, haven't they? They had seen American dollars flowing all over the place and they wanted to get in on it Non-indigenous churches and assemblies provoke the suspicion of hostile governments Whereas indigenous assemblies can go underground as no other were allowed And do Hostile governments resent Western imperialistic support and the communists use this as Propaganda in their war and of course, there's always the danger of rice Christians, isn't there? When I was in India brother Ken Smith told me that there are people in India who will profess to be saved be baptized Come into the Fellowship of the Assembly and be in the Fellowship of the Assembly for 20 years All they want is a trip to the United States. I Was speaking in a place one night I think was in Calcutta and a well-dressed man came up to me afterwards and he said good evening.

Mr. McDonnell I said good evening. He said I would like to take an Emmaus course. I said, well, that's interesting How did you know about I hadn't said a word about the Emmaus courses that night? I said, how did you know about the Emmaus course? That's wonderful because they're available right here in Calcutta He said no, you don't understand.

I want to take an Emmaus course in the United States but I said I said the same Courses that are available in the United States are available right here in Calcutta No, no, he said I want to take the course in the United States So the next day I was leaving Calcutta and I went by the turning sheep to say goodbye to Mr. and Mrs. Ken Smith And I said, oh, I forgot to tell you I have a new prospect for you for the correspondence course and She said, what's his name? And I told her, she said, all he wants is a trip to America. It was pretty good. All he wants is a trip to America And then the indigenous churches should be self-propagating and this is wonderful Isn't it wonderful that Paul went into Thessalonica and he preached the gospel and pretty soon they became a hub from which the word of God was radiating in the surrounding district Great that he could go in and see them planted as a new church in the south and then see them functioning but from you sounded forth the word of the Lord he can say to them what a wonderful thing missionaries can never evangelize the world can they? We take that for granted tonight missionaries can never evangelize the world but missionaries can teach nationals, can preach the gospel can teach nationals, can mobilize them and work with or under them and I don't know whether you'd agree with this or not, but I think it's true that most missionaries can never reach the unsaved quite like the nationals themselves can.

They have the culture, they see illustrations of Bible truth in everything around them Now there are arguments used against some of this I know and we want to think about them for instance arguments against turning the work over to nationals and it's just as true here in the United States, there is an innate hesitation about turning over leadership to other men and it's easy to say we can't do that nationals can't govern themselves nationals have their own tribal governments nationals have their own household governments in fact all society on earth is supported by two pillars, authority and submission to that authority it's impossible to think of any ordered society whether political religious or anything else that doesn't have authority and subjection to that authority and tribes have

it and sometimes it's very very strong and they do know how to govern themselves they have their own government another objection is they don't know how to do things right they don't know how to do things right well that means what that really means is they don't know how to do things the way we do them that's really what it means and it's true that many of them wouldn't do things the way I'll never forget one night I was down in Mexico City we were having a meeting and one of the girls from OM was going to sing a solo and a young Mexican fellow got up to the piano and I tell you he fairly murdered it it was awful she would be ready for the next note and went off on a trill somewhere and she would just stand there and hold her

breath until he got through with the trill and I was squirming

it was a most uncomfortable experience for me but I looked around and I saw the people, the Mexican people were enjoying it and I thought to myself what's the matter with you McDonald this is the way it should be I was squirming it the way he was carrying on at the piano but they thought it was wonderful that the Mexican fellow was up there carrying on and it was and I changed my whole thinking on the process I think what we have to realize is that just as sometimes we have resentments toward the Nationals they have resentments toward us, they say that we don't understand their concepts of time that's true and of courtesy and of personal friendship I think we have to plead guilty to some of it they say that we have a domineering attitude that we're full of superiority they sometimes feel

resentful that missionaries don't want their children to marry foreign Nationals or that a missionary may be called home if he falls in love with a National some Nationals resent the time that missionaries spend in housekeeping at the market with mail, caring for children visiting with other missionaries rather than doing missionary work it's good to know what people think about us isn't it they they resent the fact that missionaries don't adapt themselves to foreign courtesy they're especially resentful when missionaries talk in their presence in English and they don't understand what's being said and it isn't particularly courteous is it and many of them feel resentful when we don't learn the language well I remember one brother, young brother from this country going down to Argentina

years ago he comes with a word in his mouth became proficient in their language and they were exhilarated the missionaries have resentment toward the Nationals oftentimes they say the people don't appreciate us and all we're doing for them they say the people are completely irresponsible or they're not educated enough to take over or they're always late or they fail to pay back loans or are always late in doing so we here in the United States have had some experiences with this and I'm sure many of you are familiar with them and I think some of us have to admit that we've made mistakes ourselves I remember years ago two gentlemen came from an Asian country they started touring the assembly and the money started rolling in they happened to be wearing very tattered clothes like the

Gibeonites and all the wonderful clothing centers offered to completely outfit them but they didn't want to be outfitted they toured the assemblies and they went back to their country relatively speaking millionaires and it took the work of God 20 years to recover from the strife conflict jealousy that resulted from that you don't believe it?

Ask Mr. J. M. Davies he's the one who told me it took 20 years for the work to recover from the harm that was done those men should have been supported by their own assembly but it's even true today that these men can come and tour American assemblies without even being checked on we had a horrible case of that in recent years where a man came purported to be from the assemblies in an oriental city and he wasn't at all as a matter of fact he was living in Sim in that city but he came to this country did very well financially I think one of the worst cases I ever heard was a couple that came and took up graduate work here and were commended commended by an American assembly to go back to their own country not indigenous is it?

I don't understand that as being indigenous they're supposed to be commended by an assembly in their own country they went back with a Mercedes Benz car in that particular country I can't think of anything worse than a Mercedes Benz car you talk about separating them from the people it would be horrible and they went back with a guarantee of so many dollars a month four years later they came back to the United

States on their first furlough violations of indigenous principles but I think the positive side is what a wonderful thing it is to be used of God one of the greatest of calling to be used of God to go into an area to see people saved to see them transformed by the grace of God to see them gathered in New Testament assemblies and see them propagating the word of truth see that assembly becoming a mother assembly and others being formed as a result of it this is God's program I believe for this day and it works in every country every clime every culture it's God's way and there's nothing better than God's way though I have no doubt this will stimulate some discussions and sparks and I don't mind that at all I'd just like to close with a quotation from Dr.

Moffat one of the great missionaries to Korea he said as a missionary you have no right ever to expect to have the satisfaction of doing any job well oh I said why not because he said it's your business as soon as you can find a Korean who can do what you're doing maybe not as well as you're doing it but if he can do it at all to put him in your place and you drop back and do something else you're here to start a church establish a church it isn't your church it's a Korean church and they must take over just as quickly as possible it's up to you therefore to retire whenever you have a chance and make yourself expendable so that everything you started will be taken over by Korean Christians they may make mistakes but they'll learn from them just as you did I think that's thrilling I think it's thrilling to look upon ourselves as being expendable and one of the greatest joys in life is to be able to train other men men and women to take our places and see the work of God moving forward so we pray Father we just thank you for this time together tonight we thank you for your word thank you for this great principle we find in the writings of the Apostle Paul that the risen ascended Lord Jesus gave gifts for building up the saints for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ Father we believe that we found divine principles here and we pray that we might stick with them in a day when so many are offering the clergy laity system as the panacea for all ill even when it's creeping in among the assemblies in this country and very strongly so Father we pray that you'll call us back to the word and that we might have the joy of seeing this happening in a grander scale in our midst both at home and abroad we would just come to you tonight Lord and lay ourselves at your feet and say Lord use us use us for your honor and for your glory we ask it in Jesus name and for his sake, Amen

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