

Presence





Introduction

We live in a frenzied, splintered, and rapidly changing world. For many, cultural forces are moving quicker than they have the ability to keep up with. How does this influence the human experience in modern society? It promotes escapist behaviors and a soul poverty. To make it through you've got to run until you can't feel your legs, or risk feeling left behind.

It should be different for the disciples of Jesus. God promised His presence would indwell believers who place their faith in Him, bringing forth streams of living water from within. Why then is it that so many Christians feel nothing but an empty well within themselves? Where is God? Why can't we sense His presence?

If the forces of culture cause us to lack even a basic understanding of our own selves, then how can we possibly have a sense of God's presence



within us? If we do not have enough space, enough reflection, enough presence in our own experiences, how can we possibly have room to see God at work in and around us? And if we lack this presence of being, and an understanding of God's indwelling presence, how can we possibly ever hope to presence Him in our fellowship or in our city?

What we need is to slow down. We need to look deeply into God's Word and be confronted not only by the reality we are living in, but by the promise of God's nearness and His ever-present help. We need to see our brothers and sisters all around us. We need to have our feet planted in our city and become more available to our neighbors. Presence is important because this place and time matters for this is the time I am alive and this is the place where God is and is at work around me.

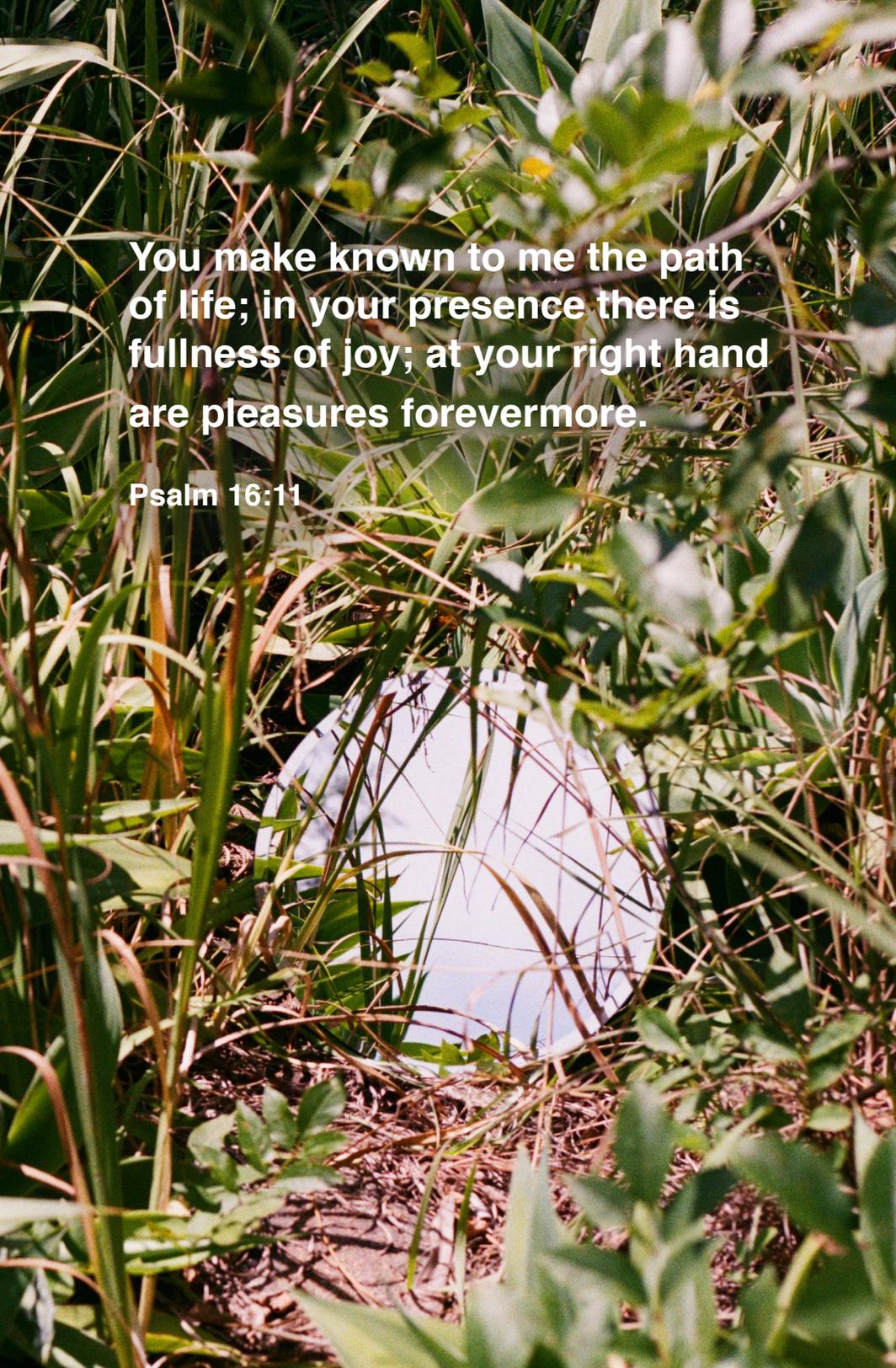
Week 1 | Day 1

Invitation to Presence

The word “presence” speaks of intimacy and intentionality, of rest and engagement, of knowing and being known. In this way, it is a form of being in relationship with another. From the very beginning God has created humanity to live out of an ever-present relationship with Himself. God was present with Adam and Eve in the Garden, then with the people of Israel through the tabernacle, and later in the temple in Israel. God would ultimately become present with humanity by taking on human flesh Himself in paving the way for His presence to reside within the human soul. As the people of God, we now have the highest privilege of the very presence of God living within us. Yet, often because of frantic lifestyles, daily distractions, and the burdens weighing upon our own hearts, we struggle with more fully experiencing God’s presence both in and around us. Our struggle to experience and live out of God’s presence invariably impacts the way we experience ourselves and others (as well as how others experience us) daily.

For today, set aside at least 20 minutes to consider and respond to the following questions:

- **How do you tend to recognize God’s presence in your daily life? Are there times when you sense you are nearer or further from God or that He is nearer or further from you? Describe those times.**
- **How does the lack or abundance of the “fruit of the Spirit” (love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control) in your life reveal God’s presence and His will? Are there any qualities that particularly stand out to you as revealing God’s nearness to you, or revealing some perceived distance?**
- **What has God been doing in your life, or what has He been revealing to you, in the past six months? What themes are emerging, and how will you attend to them?**



**You make known to me the path
of life; in your presence there is
fullness of joy; at your right hand
are pleasures forevermore.**

Psalm 16:11

Week 1 | Day 2

Invitation to Being Known

Read: Psalm 139:1-18

Set apart at least 15 minutes to sit with God today. Go for a leisurely walk or find a room or open area where you can comfortably sit or lay, and make sure that this is a space free from things that easily distract you. In preparation for this time, present yourself to God with the words “God, here I am.” As distractions come to mind, release them by picturing them as boats floating down a river. Allow the current to carry these distractions away. As you release these distractions, gently return your mind to God by repeating the phrase “God, here I am.”

What was this time like for you? Take a moment to write down your experience with this exercise. Was it encouraging or difficult? What thoughts, feelings, or questions came up for you through this reading and exercise?



Challenge: Take 15 minutes in the middle of your workday at lunch or during a break from your desk to practice the above prayer and exercise throughout the rest of this week. If you're a parent, take turns watching the kids with your spouse and give each other the space to do the exercise, or take time in the evening after putting the kids down to bed. Maybe offer yourself to God in prayer like this when you find yourself experiencing a stressful or taxing part of your day.

When you are finished, close your time with this prayer:

“My heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of time and space just to be with you. Thank you that you see me and know me and love me, right where I am at. Help me to hear from you. May my heart become attuned to your voice. Help me to find fullness of joy, peace, and hope by being in your presence. May I come to more fully know myself for both who I am and who you have created me to be, as I find my rest in your presence. Through Christ I pray, amen.”





Week 1 | Day 3

Invitation to Truth

Read: Psalm 139:1-18 (Again)

Similar to yesterday, set apart at least 15 minutes to sit with God today. Find a place free from things that easily distract you. Invite God into a conversation with you with the following prayer: “My heavenly Father, what do you think about me? How do you feel toward me?” After offering this prayer, read through Psalm 139:1-18 one more time and reserve the remainder of your time for silent listening to God. Our time in the Scriptures isn’t about simply getting in our reading for the day, but about really allowing God’s Word to enter into our hearts and minds by the work of God’s Spirit. Make note of any thoughts, emotions, memories, images, or Scriptures that come to mind as you read and wait.

What came up for you during this exercise? Take a moment to jot down anything that arose for you (thoughts, emotions, memories, images, or Scriptures), then come back later in the day (perhaps before going to sleep) and spend some time journaling about this time in prayer, feelings, or questions came up for you through this reading and exercise?

When you are finished, close your time with this prayer:

“My heavenly Father, thank you that you see me and know me and love me, right where I am at. Thank you that you moved toward me with gracious love even when I did not acknowledge you; even when I pursued life on my own terms; even in the depths of my sin and depravity. Thank you that your thoughts toward me are good. Thank you for loving me, saving me, and for setting me on a path toward freedom and wholeness. May I come to more fully know myself for both who I am and who you have created me to be, as I find my rest in your presence. Through Christ I pray, amen.”

Invitation to Honesty

Read: Psalm 139:19-24

Perhaps one of the most difficult barriers we face in our learning to be present with God and others is the issue of honesty. Learning to be honest with ourselves and God is necessary to our being present in every relationship. Honesty is not a matter of being right or wrong in how we think or feel, but as we see with David's prayer here, it is a matter of opening ourselves to God as fully as possible and inviting Him into our inner conversation.

At the end of your day, set apart at least 20 minutes to walk through the following exercise. Find a place free from distractions. Begin your time with the prayer of David in Psalm 139:23-24:

“Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.” Amen.

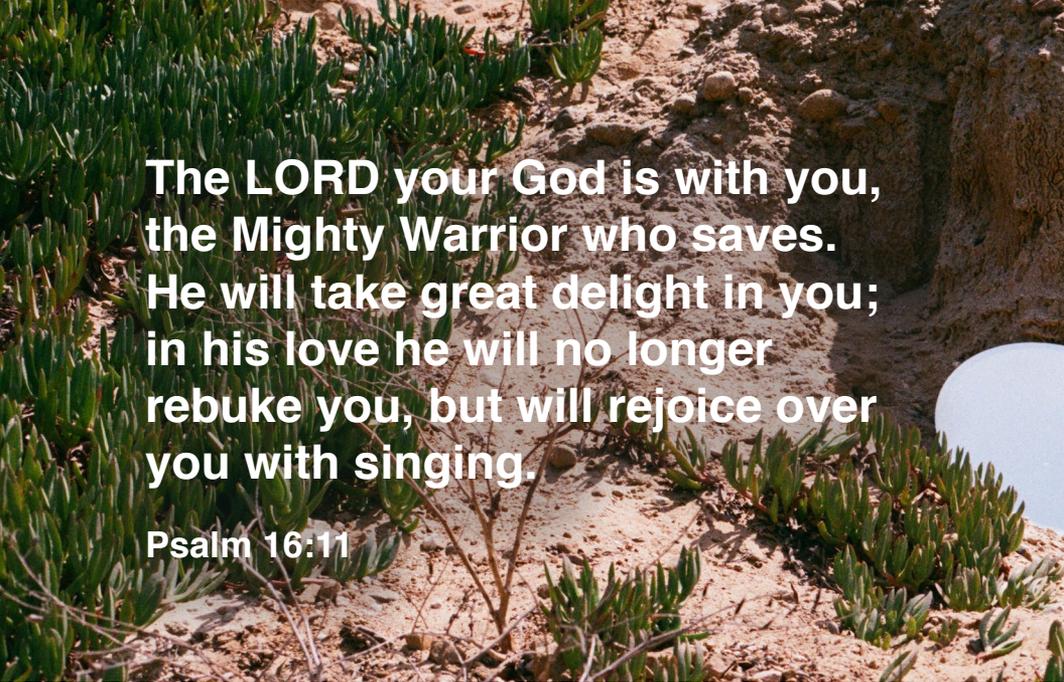
Now, make a list of feeling words (for example: accepted, anxious, apathetic, confused, defeated, disgusted, ecstatic, enraged, paranoid, sorrowful, undecided, etc.) As you consider the following questions, allow your list of words to help you articulate what drains or saps you and what gives you life. Allow your sense of self-awareness and knowing to inform your choices. There is not a right or wrong answer to these questions; what is most important is that you answer these questions honestly:

What was the most life-giving part of my day? What was the most life-hindering or life-draining part of my day?

When today did I have the deepest sense of connection with God, others, and myself? When today did I have the least sense of connection?

Take a moment to offer these reflections on your day and these honest realities to God in prayer. We may think that God is not concerned with what we have to share, but we are mistaken. Jesus calls the Spirit of God our comforter and counselor (John 14:26). God desires to be the one we turn to in the everyday ups-and-downs we experience.





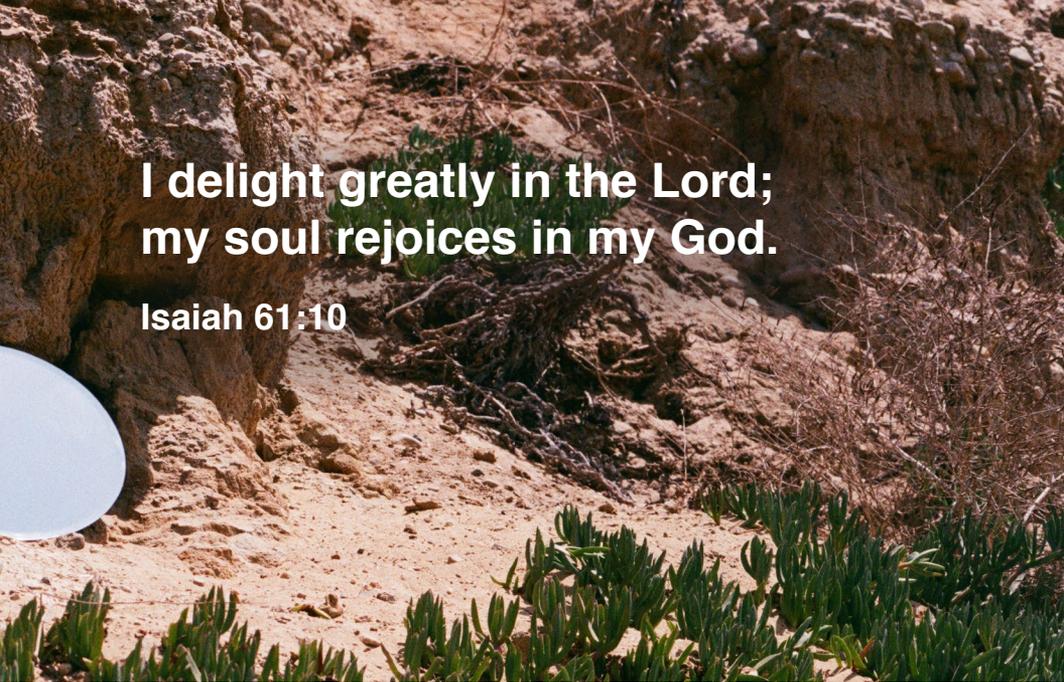
**The LORD your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you;
in his love he will no longer
rebuke you, but will rejoice over
you with singing.**

Psalm 16:11

Week 1 | Day 5

Invitation to Truth

In Scripture we see that not only does God delight in us, but we are to find great delight in Him. Set apart at least 30 minutes today (or plan for it tomorrow) to do something that is truly invigorating and life-giving for you. Maybe it is going for a walk, reading a book, playing an instrument, surfing, working on a craft or hobby, gardening, creative writing, drawing or painting, or playing a sport. Whatever it is, make it a priority to do it. As you prepare to engage in this activity, take a moment to pray and invite God into this activity with you. Ask God to help you be mindful of His presence with you as you enjoy this time. Throughout the activity consider ways to direct your mind toward God, perhaps through gratitude or even pausing to consider how God is present with you in the midst of the activity. Converse with God throughout the activity, tell Him what you are thinking and feeling, tell Him what you are experiencing, desire, or need at any given moment.



**I delight greatly in the Lord;
my soul rejoices in my God.**

Isaiah 61:10

When you are finished, close your time with this prayer:

“My heavenly Father, thank you for being with me in this place. Thank you for providing me with the desire and ability to enjoy activities that are encouraging and revitalizing to my soul. May I increasingly come to experience your pleasure in me as I enjoy what you have created, and as I pursue the passions you have created me with. May I find my deepest satisfaction, my truest happiness, and my fullest joy as I learn to live out of your presence. Amen.”

Week 2 | Day 1

Opening to Friendship with God

It's easy to see God as an authority figure, a father, a fierce and righteous judge. But as we learned last week by stepping into the presence of God, when we keep Him at an arm's length we miss out on God's ultimate vision for us. By calling his disciples "friends" in John 15, Jesus demonstrates that it doesn't take special skills or a perfect track record to be a friend of God. Instead, all it takes is a willingness to simply enter into relationship with Him.

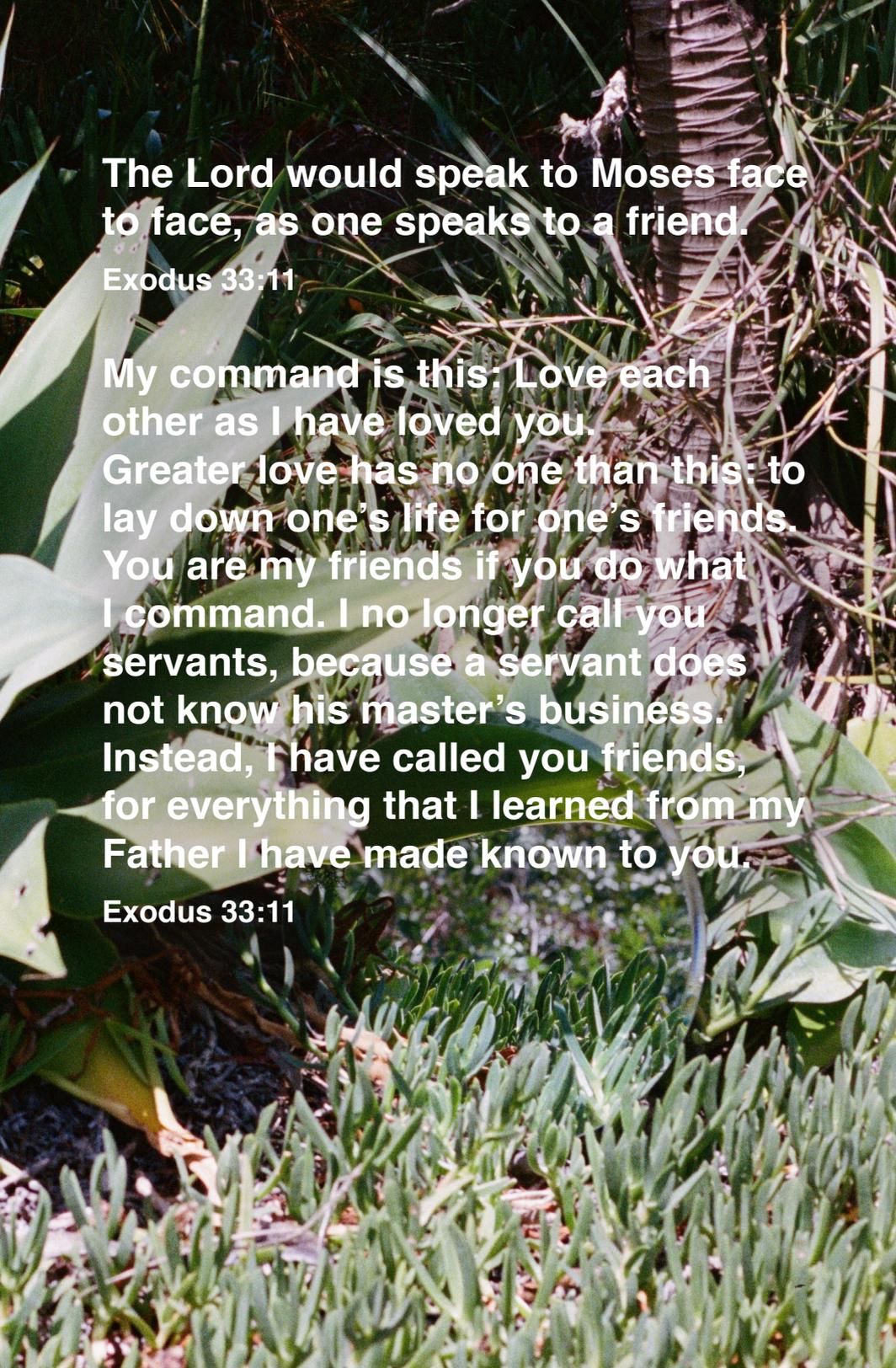
This week, we will be seeking to involve God in our lives moment-by-moment. Rather than anticipating a time when distractions have faded and disappointments have been resolved, come to God right where you are – in spite of the life around you. By allowing Him to break into your schedule and involving Him in the mundane events of your day, you can create the space to develop a true intimacy with your Savior. Over the next few days we will reorient how we approach our relationship with God so that we can begin to enjoy His company and ignite a desire to know and be known on an even deeper level.

As you open up to friendship with God, take a few moments to consider what you'd like that relationship to look like.

What excites you about the prospect of a close friendship with your Creator?

What doubts or fears come to mind as you consider becoming a friend of God?

After exploring these expectations, take a moment to bring these things to the Lord in prayer. Tell Him how you'd like to be His friend, to meet with him face to face, and in what ways you feel that would transform your life. Be honest about what's holding you back and ask the Holy Spirit to help you to relentlessly pursue God every day. Close your prayer by thanking Him for making a relationship with you His utmost desire, acknowledging that He rescued you because He delighted in you (Psalm 18:19).



**The Lord would speak to Moses face
to face, as one speaks to a friend.**

Exodus 33:11

**My command is this: Love each
other as I have loved you.
Greater love has no one than this: to
lay down one's life for one's friends.
You are my friends if you do what
I command. I no longer call you
servants, because a servant does
not know his master's business.
Instead, I have called you friends,
for everything that I learned from my
Father I have made known to you.**

Exodus 33:11



Relational Intentionality

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Mark 1:35

Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Luke 5:15-16

Jesus made it a priority to spend time with his Father. All four Gospels recount Jesus' steadfast prayer life, noting that He often retreated at night, at dawn, and even when His life was so busy that He didn't have time to eat (Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:31; Luke 6:12; John 6:15). Because of His keen understanding of the heart of God, He knew to make time away in the presence of the Lord a top concern. Today, we are going to explore what things in our lives may keep us from regularly interacting with God.

Spend 15-20 minutes today reflecting on the following:

- **When considering your schedule and daily habits, what are some things that could interfere with your time with God?**
- **How can you strategically go about your tasks this week so you can spend time with the Lord with the least amount of distraction?**

Challenge: It is a beautiful thing when God's people put down their "things" and create intentional space to be with Him. Take a moment to look over the items identified in the questions above, noting which particular distraction you can remove this week to allow space to engage with God. That may mean deleting Instagram, taking a break from turning on Netflix after work, or skipping a meal. With this time carved out in your schedule, you'll have the breathing room to meet up with God each day this week without feeling like you have to squeeze Him in as an afterthought. By fasting from a key distraction and setting apart time for God on a daily basis, you can begin to establish a rhythm of life that prioritizes your friendship and fosters intimacy.

Engaging with Transparency

Our attitudes about God often keep us from approaching Him. Depending on where you are at in your spiritual journey, you may be wondering what will happen if you make time for God. Once you clear a space in your day for Him, will He even show up? What if God says something you don't like? What if He doesn't say anything at all?

Read: Psalm 22

Clearly, you are not alone in those thoughts. Throughout the Psalms, many of God's holy people expressed feelings of doubt and disappointment. It is important to identify any anxious thoughts, fears, doubts, or expectations that make it difficult to remain present with God. Without addressing them head on, such hang-ups can be as much of a distraction to us as a packed schedule or overflowing inbox.

Spend 15-20 minutes today reflecting on the following:

- **What expectations do I have about how God will speak when I meet with Him?**
- **What fears or anxieties do I have about trying to hear from God?**

If you had responses to any of these questions, take this time to bring those to the Lord in prayer. Use the sample prayer below if you would like:

“God, I struggle to meet with you. I have _____ that gets in the way. I want to meet with you and enjoy your presence but struggle to believe that _____. I know you know all things and you can heal all things. Please, God, help me overcome these thoughts and feelings so that I can come to you without a plan or expectations and rest in your goodness. I long to see you face to face. Amen.”





Week 2 | Day 4

Setting Our Hearts to Hear God

My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, Lord, I will seek.

Psalm 27:8

The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

1 Samuel 3:10

We long to hear a word from God, yet we often forget that God has already revealed much about Himself, His desires, and His ways through Scripture, the written "words" of God (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20; Hebrews 13:7-9). Scripture reveals to us the unchanging nature and character of God, His heart for humanity and purposes for creation. The written word is living and powerful, providing insight and guidance, and power and transformation as we open ourselves to God and allow His Spirit to speak His word anew to our hearts.

Find a quiet place to sit with your Bible. Begin this time by opening yourself to God, to allow the Spirit to use Scripture to reveal and speak to your heart, and pray this simple prayer: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." Read a passage you're already in the midst of studying, or if you don't know where to turn, start by reading the letter of 1 John.

Read slowly until a word or phrase stands out to you. When this word becomes evident, attend to this word. Do not read any further. Be attentive to what this word or phrase is exposing or stirring up within you. What thoughts, feelings, images, memories, or other Scriptures are coming to mind?

Let this word or phrase call you into a posture of prayer throughout the day, inviting the Holy Spirit to help you discern what God may be speaking to you.

Set aside at least 15-20 minutes at the end of your day for reflection. In this time consider how God might be comforting, convicting, challenging, or directing you through what seems to be coming up for you as the Spirit speaks this word or phrase to your heart.

**Lord, I wait for you;
you will answer, Lord my God.**

Psalm 38:15

**I will give you thanks, for
you answered me; you have
become my salvation.**

Psalm 118:21

Week 2 | Day 5

Remember & Reflect

Today we will reflect on our experience with God over this past two weeks. Set aside at least 15-20 minutes to consider the following questions and record your responses in a journal, in the space below in this booklet, or on a piece of paper that you will keep in your Bible.

How have you experienced God's presence afresh or in completely new ways over the past two weeks?

In what ways has engaging with God on a daily basis positively impacted your life?

What would it look like for you to make time and create space to be with God as we move beyond this series? How have these exercises informed how you may change your approach to your relationship with God?



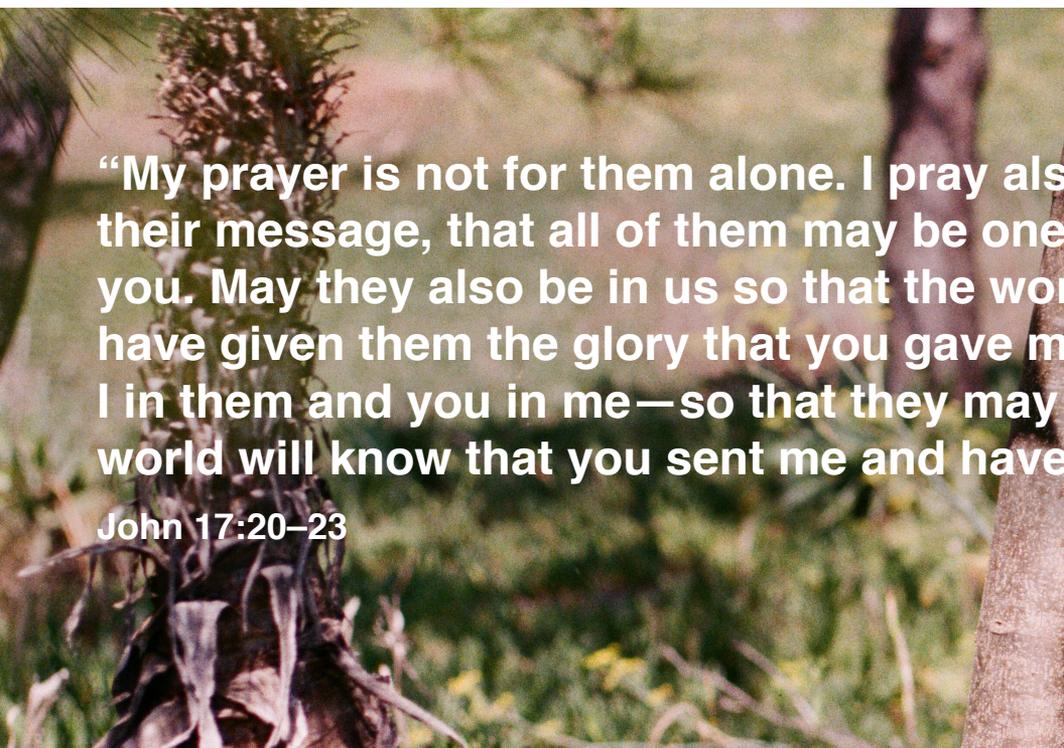
After fasting from a key distraction this week, re-evaluate the distractions in your life that you identified a few days ago and how to make lasting changes to your daily schedule in order to prioritize your friendship with God.

As with any relationship, time together is key. The more time you spend together, the more you will have to talk about, and the more likely you are to spend even more time meeting with Him – face to face. And over time, as with our deepest relationships, you will learn to understand the nuances and subtleties of His voice and presence. You will more easily discern His will, His ways, and how He is both with you and leading you.

Week 3 | Day 1

Called into Community

Have you ever heard the phrase, “Life isn’t meant to be lived alone?” There’s a natural understanding we have that life is lived alongside others. In our day and age, we are more connected than ever. Through modern innovations in technology we are more reachable and available to more people than any generation before us. Yet studies indicate that we feel lonelier than ever before. In Scripture, we see Jesus demonstrate the value of intentional and present community throughout his ministry. Jesus not only called individuals to follow Him, but in doing so He was forming a new kind of community centered on Himself. We see his disciples further this mission as the early church spreads throughout the world. There is a beauty in community. In bringing together people with different passions, personalities, and capacities coming together under the unified identity and mission of Christ. God calls us into presence with Himself and those around us. That’s what community means to Him. It’s through community that the love and goodness of God is demonstrated to the world around us.



“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who believe in your message, that all of them may be one with you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I in them and you in me—so that they may believe that you have loved the world and that you have sent me and have given them the glory that you gave me, so that they may know that you sent me and have loved the world will know that you sent me and have loved the world.”

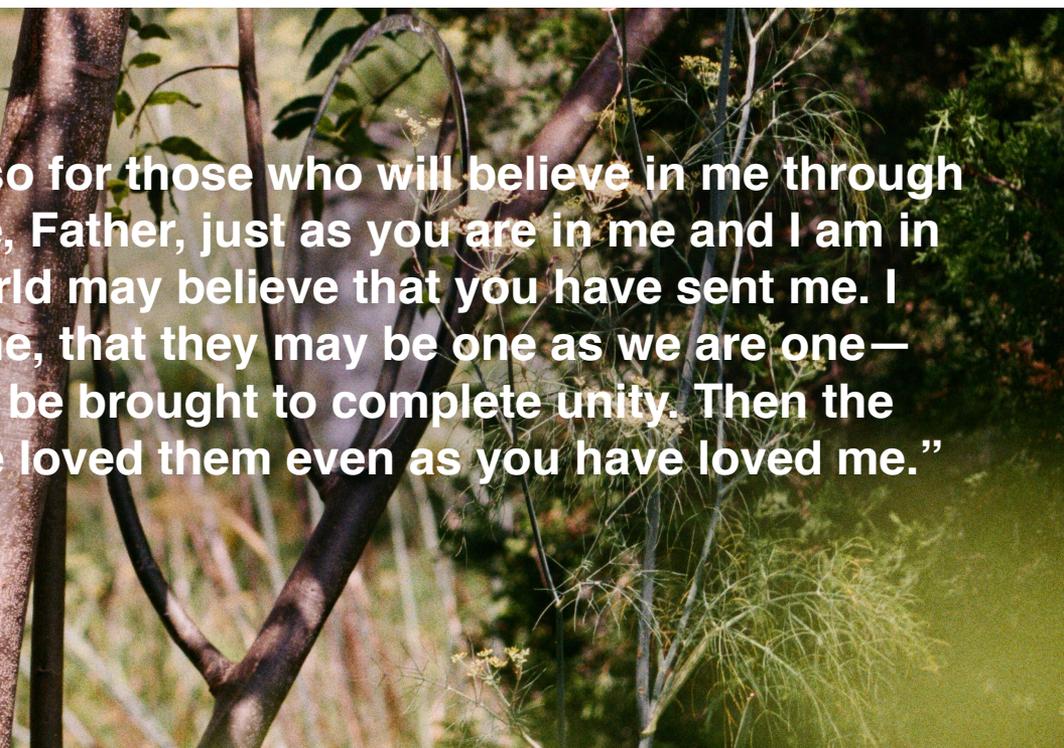
John 17:20–23

Today, set aside at least 20 minutes to consider and reflect on the following questions:

Take a moment to consider how God has uniquely made you with your own personality and characteristics that make you, you. How might God be calling you to use your personality and gifts to encourage others?

In what ways might being in community encourage and strengthen your life with God?

How might God be calling you to more intentionally engage in our church community?



o for those who will believe in me through
, Father, just as you are in me and I am in
rld may believe that you have sent me. I
e, that they may be one as we are one—
be brought to complete unity. Then the
e loved them even as you have loved me.”

Reflecting on Community

In Genesis 2, God creates the first community of people. Realizing that “it is not good for man to be alone,” He created another person for man to walk through life with and their relationship formed the first. It’s clear, God created us for community from the start. “Community” is a word often used in our church context. We have a church “community” or gathering of people we call BRANCHES. We also live in a community or neighborhood. Some communities are physical gatherings of people, while others are defined by a common interest. We all belong to some type of community, yet there might be ways we want to engage more.

Do you feel a need or longing for community? Maybe it’s already built into your life, through family or friends. Maybe you struggle to feel a sense of belonging. God has a purpose for community. He desires for His people to be in community. He’s created us for a meaningful experience of community from the beginning.

Read: Romans 12:4-8

In Matthew 10, Jesus calls 12 disciples to follow him. These young men were all from different communities (some were even at odds with each other!), yet Jesus intentionally calls them to join and follow Him. In Romans 12 we are described as being unique “members” of the “body of Christ.” Ponder this reality for a moment. How might this impact the ways in which you view and pursue community at BRANCHES?

Spend 15-20 minutes today reflecting on the following:

- When considering your schedule and daily habits, what are some things that could interfere with your time with God?
- How can you strategically go about your tasks this week so you can spend time with the Lord with the least amount of distraction?

Spend time in prayer, both speaking and listening to God as you reflect on your desires and thoughts about community.

Cultivating Community

Part of normal life is interacting with other people. Whether it's with family, work, or school, we usually have a part of our day where we are with others in an intentional way. We have rhythms in life, routines if you will, that define how we go about our day, week, month, etc. Maybe you have a family tradition where everyone gathers once a year, or a coffee date with a best friend once a week, or a monthly movie night as a family in your living room. These gatherings aren't empty rituals without any significance. They change us. They allow us to become more present with each other. Additionally, when they occur among the family of believers, they encourage a greater awareness of God's presence.

Read: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Hebrews 10:24-25

Based on these passages, what are some words you would use to describe God's purposes for community?

Challenge: Two days ago, you were asked to consider ways that God may be calling you to engage more in our church community. Perhaps you feel a prompted to join a Life Group or one of our ministry teams, or maybe it is to invite others into your life and cultivate friendships. Today it's time to take a step toward cultivating community. Whatever you are feeling prompted toward, determine what steps you need to take to make it happen — and step out!

If you are feeling prompted to join a Life Group, then reach out to ccamp@brancheshb.com

If you are feeling called to join a ministry team (greeters, production, hospitality, connections, children's ministry) then (again) reach out to ccamp@brancheshb.com

If you would like to develop new friendships within our community, then reach out and invite someone to coffee, or another couple over for dinner or a play date (if you have kids).

Finish your time in prayer, asking God for the courage and strength to follow through on this desire to cultivate a greater experience of community.

Week 3 | Day 4

Spiritual Friendship

Take a moment to think about the word friendship.

What does it mean to you? Do you have people in your life that you consider friends? Friendship is all over the Bible. In the gospels, Jesus carries out His ministry on Earth with friends that He has chosen for the journey. He shares time with them and opens His heart to them. These friends are His “go-to” people. After Jesus’ time on Earth, we see the early church community begin to grow and friendships continue among the apostles. The apostle Paul had important friendships as he traveled the ancient world sharing the news of the resurrected Christ. He shared good experiences and hard experiences with his friends, even disagreeing with them in honest and loving ways. This was his most tight-knit community.

There is nothing like a good friend. Someone you can trust. Someone you can share a difficult conversation with. Someone who truly knows you. Often times, God uses our closest friends in the church to reveal His presence to us. We must recognize it is the Spirit of God working through them and ministering to us as they come alongside us in our life experiences, both good and bad.

Read: Romans 12:4-8

Take some time and think about the deepest friendships in your life.
Maybe you just need someone to talk through a hard time in your life with.
Maybe you need to take a moment and encourage a friend.
Maybe you need to share some exciting news.
Maybe you just need to actually take the time to be available to a friend who means a lot to you.

Find time this week to spend with a close friend, maybe even one you’ve lost touch with in the busyness of life. Tell them how you’re really doing. Pray with them. Build one another up. Enjoy each other’s company and glorify God with your fellowship.





Anticipation

Read: Acts 2:42-47; Revelation 19:1-10

We see in Acts 2 the early church community beginning to form. Christians in the early church gathered and shared meals together, participating in communion. They looked out for one another and worshiped together. Acts 2:42 says, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” Early Christians committed themselves to the practice of regular gatherings where they would pray, worship together, and read the Scripture. The Bible explains that these gatherings were a place of honesty, thanksgiving, and gladness for what God was doing. Additionally, these times together not only provided edification and encouragement but a reminder for what was still to come. Gathering together in the present refreshes our hope and anticipation for the day when Christ’s victory will be fully realized. The time when the entire community of God’s people, the Church, will worship together in fullness and freedom, in wholeness and adoration.

Today, consider the value of our regular weekend gatherings as a church. Maybe you are a regularly involved member of the community through serving. Maybe you remember to go to church when your alarm goes off Sunday morning. Maybe it’s a struggle to come to a gathering with so many people you don’t know. Wherever you are at, take some time to considering the following:

In what specific ways do you personally wish to be known by your community? In what ways do you want to know others?

Do you gather with the purpose of connecting with others in mind or do you often keep a lower profile? What keeps you from engaging with others at our regular gatherings?

How can the regular practice of gathering with the church impact your spiritual growth?

In just a few days we will all gather together as one church. As you prepare to re-engage with your church community on Sunday, think about allowing yourself to be known. Take an extra moment to participate in all that is taking place that morning. We gather to support and care for one another. We gather to be known by one another. We gather to know God together, worship Him, and engage with His presence. or directing you through what seems to be coming up for you as the Spirit speaks this word or phrase to your heart.

I am the light of the world.

**Whoever follows me will never walk
in darkness,**

but will have the light of life.

John 8:12

Week 4 | Day 1

The Need for Light

Read: John 1:1-18

Set aside at least 15 minutes today for the practice of silence, away from distraction. Read John 1:1-18 and reflect on the ways that Jesus was present with others, His impact in the story of the world, and His message to all the people of all the nations and adoration.

On a piece of paper, or in a journal, write down the ways Jesus has shed life-giving light into the dark “plots” of your own story, and how His reviving presence and power has restored you. Just as the stories of Jesus’ interactions with people in Scripture hold power and influence for us today, so does your individual story hold power and influence when you extend Christ’s love and mission to others today!



Close your time with a prayer of thankfulness for these things.

“Jesus, thank you for entering into the weakness and suffering of the human condition. Thank you for inviting me to follow after you, for entering into my world – into my wounds, weakness, and sinful struggles. Thank you for seeing me and loving me, right where I am. Thank you for the healing you’ve already brought, as well as for that which is still to come. Thank you for forgiveness of my sin and the freedom from sinful struggles that you continue to bring to every aspect of my life. And thank you for inviting me to share with you in bringing salvation to others. Amen.”

Week 4 | Day 2

The Need for Humility

Take a moment to think about the word friendship.

What does it mean to you? Do you have people in your life that you consider friends? Friendship is all over the Bible. In the gospels, Jesus carries out His ministry on Earth with friends that He has chosen for the journey. He shares time with them and opens His heart to them. These friends are His “go-to” people. After Jesus’ time on Earth, we see the early church community begin to grow and friendships continue among the apostles. The apostle Paul had important friendships as he traveled the ancient world sharing the news of the resurrected Christ. He shared good experiences and hard experiences with his friends, even disagreeing with them in honest and loving ways. This was his most tight-knit community.

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Read: Romans 12:4-8

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Maybe you just need someone to talk through a hard time in your life with.
Maybe you need to take a moment and encourage a friend.
Maybe you need to share some exciting news.
Maybe you just need to actually take the time to be available to a friend who means a lot to you.

Find time this week to spend with a close friend, maybe even one you’ve lost touch with in the busyness of life. Tell them how you’re really doing. Pray with them. Build one another up. Enjoy each other’s company and glorify God with your fellowship.



Week 4 | Day 3

The Need for Individualization

Read: John 11:17-43

Jesus did not say the same words or tell the same parables over and over. In His travels and encounters with people from all different walks of life, Jesus responded uniquely to each individual with whom He interacted. Jesus' responses sometimes seem unexpected, but His questions and responses were carefully composed to reveal two things: the heart of the person with whom He spoke, and His own heart of redemptive love.

Read the story of Lazarus' death and resurrection in John 11:17-43 once. Then read verses 21-27 and verses 32-35 again. How did Jesus respond differently to the same exact inquiry from each of Lazarus' sisters?

To Martha, Jesus provides encouragement and hope by saying "Your brother will rise again." To Mary, He responds with deep compassion, and weeps with her. So too should our interactions with others be individualized! There is no one way to share Christ's love, and no one way to say God's Truth. Our journey here on earth involves walking with others step for step, hearing their



stories, and sharing our own stories of God's redemptive power in our lives. It is during these interactions that we have the honor of extending God's invitation to enjoy life in His love, forever.

Challenge: As you go about your day, take note when you are speaking to someone and try to really listen to what they are saying and how they are feeling, rather than simply waiting for your opportunity to speak. Try to avoid responding to them in your typical way; instead, take your time to process what they have said and thoughtfully consider where they are coming from. In doing so, you can begin to break down the walls of casual conversation and begin to build more meaningful relationships.

Close your time in prayer, thanking God for the unique relationship He has with you, and the unique ways He has pulled you from your own darkness and isolation. Ask God to lead you through interactions with those He has placed your life, that He would guide your words and responses to dig to the heart of the individual, thereby opening the door for life-giving conversation and relationship.





Week 4 | Day 4

A Message of Hope

Walking in step with others is an exercise of deep empathy and compassion. Mourning with those who mourn can be emotionally challenging, for such experiences are taxing. Even rejoicing with others requires us to set aside our own daily challenges and express joy. Challenges present in the daily clash between hurt and happiness, joy and suffering, groaning and rejoicing. The very sweetest moments in life, then, still always bear a tinge of bitterness, because we are always aware and faced with the friction of this broken world.

How then can we walk alongside others and not grow weary? One way is through regularly recalling to mind the promises of God and the hope of days to come. Wherever God reigns, there His Kingdom is.

Read Revelation 21:2-7. Write it down on a notecard and place it somewhere in your home where you can see and read it repeatedly throughout the day. For those who feel led, commit this passage to memory. Reflect on God's faithfulness and rejoice in His promise for a forever-future in the fully-realized Holy Kingdom. Thank God for His provision and promises, and ask Him to empower you and open the way for you to share the joy of His promise to others.

Week 4 | Day 5

A Message of Presence, Forever

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Matthew 28:18-20

The greatest honor and biggest commission Jesus has given us is to share His love with all the nations. We do not go powerless, for Jesus goes with us. We do not go empty, for Jesus goes with us. We do not go fearfully, for Jesus goes with us. And we do not go alone, for Jesus goes with us.

Read Matthew 28:20 again.

With His example, with His message, and with His authority, we are privileged to share in His mission and ministry. Like little mirrors walking amongst the world, we reflect the light - his holiness and his glory - to all. Like cups overflowing with his love and forgiveness, we extend humility and grace to all. We are Christians (i.e., literally, “little Christs”), and we are the Church (i.e., the body of Christ). Our presence in the world is Christ’s presence in the world for His Spirit works in and through us. To Him be the glory!

Challenge: Reach out to the individual(s) you identified a few days ago just to show them love. Whether that means sending a heartfelt note, having a conversation over dinner, or folding a mountain of laundry on a couch, what matters most is that you humbly come alongside another person just to hear their stories and share how God, through His presence, has come alongside you.





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