



A **heart** FOR BIBLICAL JUSTICE

A 15 DAY DEVOTIONAL ON A BIBLICAL
RESPONSE TO JUSTICE

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This devotional guide consists of scripture passages and related questions to help you hear God's heart and voice on matters of Godly justice. It is intended to help you "Dwell in the Word" rather than just receive information or read words of spiritual encouragement - although of course it should do both these things too! The three weeks will, to some extent, copy the content and focus of a three week Justice Journey but it can also stand alone as a mini devotional for anyone wanting to go deeper into scripture on the topic of justice. Each week contain both Old and New Testament texts in an attempt to represent the fullness and constancy of God's word.

The first week looks at the topic of **WHY JUSTICE**, the second week at the topic of **WHERE JUSTICE** and the third week at the topic of **HOW JUSTICE**. There are of course many, many more texts that relate to the topic of justice but the writers of this guide feel sure that by the end of the three weeks you will have learnt to read all scripture through the lens of Biblical justice.

HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

Begin in a spirit of prayer, asking God for his guidance, wisdom, love and protection as you engage with his word and the subject of justice. Seek to actively listen and submit to God's Spirit and God's word as you open yourself to whatever God wants to communicate to you. Consider, contemplate, and reflect on what God is giving you as you read and meditate on scripture. Look for how the text may be personalized and integrated into your life. You may want to record your thoughts in a journal and space has been provided for this. If you are doing this study with a group, share your individual reflections. Be encouraged in the knowledge that God sends us into the world to be active agents of his love and transformation, and with each reading identify one or two actions you will take on behalf of those seeking justice. Pray and advocate to God on behalf of the suffering and ask for your own wisdom and strength to exercise a heart for justice.

Note: These devotions have been prepared using the NIV translation of the bible and whilst any translation may be used, it would be best to use the NIV if you have it. If not, you can find the texts on www.biblegateway.com.

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A Heart for Biblical Justice. A 15 day devotional on a biblical response to justice.

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WEEK 1: WHY JUSTICE?

DAY	TEXT	TITLE
1	Genesis 1:26-31	Blessed Rulers!
2	Psalms 10	The Ways of the Wicked
3	Isaiah 58:1-12	The True Fast
4	Luke 4:16-21; John 10:10; Matthew 9:35-10:1	Life to the Full
5	Colossians 1:9-14; Ephesians 2:1-10	Saved for Good Works

WEEK 2: WHERE JUSTICE?

DAY	TEXT	TITLE
6	Genesis 12:1-9	Placed
7	Numbers 13	Seeing with the Eyes of Faith
8	John 15:1-17	Placed in Christ
9	Philemon 1-25	Agents of Reconciliation
10	Psalms 146	Our Hope and Help

WEEK 3: HOW JUSTICE?

DAY	TEXT	TITLE
11	Deuteronomy 15: 1 - 11	God's Cure for Poverty
12	Leviticus 19:9-18	Rules for Living Justice
13	Matthew 5:1-15	Salt and Light
14	Acts 2:42-47; Acts 4: 32-37	No-one in Need
15	Hebrews 11:1 – 12:3	Running the race of Faith

DAY 1: BLESSED RULERS!

As we start this three week devotional journey on just living, it is good to be reminded how things were before sin came into the world. Our hope and vision for a just life is rooted in God's creation purposes the world. This is the purpose that Jesus Christ's redeeming work is restoring as he establishes his Kingdom in the world, with and through his people, the Church.

READ THE WORD

Genesis 1:26 - 31

DISCOVER THE WORD

1. Why did God make people (vs 26)?
2. Who is the "us" referred to in verse 26, in whose image we are created (vs 27)? What does this tell us about our original, pre-fall nature with which we were designed to rule?
3. What was the first thing that God did after he created people (vs 28(a))?
4. When God looked at the people he had made, how did he describe them (vs 31)?

RESPOND TO THE WORD

1. Thank and praise God for the incredible creation of people in his image. Thank him too that through Jesus Christ and the work of Holy Spirit this image is being restored in people.
2. Ask God to restore to his people, the Church, an awareness of their God-given mandate to rule in ways that reflect the image (character and purpose) of God.
3. How is the failure of people to exercise Godly rulership resulting in injustice in your context? As an image bearer of God, where and in what ways can you exercise the Godly rulership for which you were created?

NOTES:

DAY 2: THE WAYS OF THE WICKED

God, in his Word, calls us to seek justice and mercy and in that way overcome injustice (e.g. Isaiah 1:16; Micah 8:6). The bible teaches that it is the activities of people that cause injustice, and today's reading is an example of this. We will take some time to think about the ways of the wicked that are the cause of injustice, as well as reflecting on the psalmist's response.

READ THE WORD

Psalm 10

DISCOVER THE WORD

1. What are some of the emotions the writer is expressing in this psalm? Why?
2. What does this psalm tell us about the ways of the wicked and those who act unjustly?
Based on this psalm, describe a wicked or unjust person (vs 2-11)? Who is it that the wicked attack (vs 1; vs 8)?
3. What does the writer appeal to God to do, in the face of the wicked and their ways (v1; v12)?
4. What does the writer affirm in this psalm about the character and actions of God in his response to the ways of the wicked (vs 14; vs 16-18)?

RESPOND TO THE WORD

1. Thank and praise God that he is a God who listens to, encourages, and defends those who suffer as a result of the ways of the wicked.
2. Ask God to end the ways of the wicked that are causing suffering, especially to the innocent and the weak.
3. What ways of the wicked make you feel especially angry? Tell God about these ways, bringing your complaint before him, as the writer of this psalm did.
4. Is God asking you to make a specific response to the ways of the wicked in your context?

NOTES:

DAY 3: THE TRUE FAST

Fasting is a practice that can bring us closer to God when done in the right heart. However, in today's passage we see fasting being exercised merely as a religious observance, one aimed at getting a personally favourable response from God. God is clear that he finds no pleasure in such fasting, but desires rather a different and true fast.

READ THE WORD

Isaiah 58:1-12

DISCOVER THE WORD

1. In this passage, what are the people's motives for fasting (vs 2 & vs 3a)?
2. How can we see that the people's religious activity was not connecting to their day-to-day lives (vs 3b & vs 4)?
3. What is true fasting or acceptable religious activity for God (vs 6, vs 7, vs 9b & vs 10a)?
4. What does God say will be the result of this true fasting (vs 8, vs 9, vs 10b & vs 11)?
5. What will we be called if we keep this true fast (vs 12b)?

RESPOND TO THE WORD

1. Thank and praise God that he is a God who speaks to us, shows his displeasure when needed, and guides us back into the place of right living and blessing that he has for each one of us.
2. Ask God to guide his people in this city, the Church in Cape Town, more and more towards the true fast.
3. What 'religious observances' or actions might you need to confess, that you have practiced in the hopes of finding God's favour?
4. Is there specific true fasting that you feel God is calling you to in your life at this time?

NOTES:

DAY 4: LIFE TO THE FULL

In his ministry, Jesus showed and taught about the Kingdom he came to initiate and invite us to enter and receive. A Kingdom where justice prevails. In today's three short readings we will see how Jesus stated the mandate for his own ministry, and how he sought to include his followers in his ministry which seeks to bring life to the full.

READ THE WORD

Luke 4:16-21

John 10:10

Matthew 9:35-10:1

DISCOVER THE WORD

1. What reason did Jesus give for coming into the world (John 10:10)?
2. For what purpose was Jesus anointed by the Spirit of the Lord (Luke 4:18 – 19)?
3. What elements of Jesus' holistic ministry do we see in Matthew 9:35?
4. Why do you think Jesus told his disciples to 'Ask the Lord of the harvest... to send out workers into his harvest field' (Matt 9:36)?

RESPOND TO THE WORD

1. Thank and praise God that Jesus came to announce, initiate and demonstrate the 'good news of the kingdom', a kingdom where justice prevails.
2. Ask God to stop the work of 'the thief' in his stealing, killing and destruction in our city. Ask that rather the people of the city would increasingly know the life to the full that Jesus gives.
3. Who do you think Jesus would especially want to include in a 'plentiful harvest' in Cape Town today? (Read Matthew 9:36 again)
4. Who do you know who is 'harassed and helpless' that you feel compassion for? Ask God that he might give you courage and wisdom, as he did his disciples, to be an agent of healing and life to the full for that person.

NOTES:

DAY 5: SAVED FOR GOOD WORKS

The bible makes it quite clear, as we will see in today's readings, that there is nothing we can do to bring about our own salvation, other than to believe in Jesus and his saving work on the cross. However, once we are saved, there are good works waiting for us to do. We are saved not by works but for good works as those living in and for God's kingdom.

READ THE WORD

Ephesians 2:1-10

Colossians 1:9-14

DISCOVER THE WORD

1. Who are we according to Ephesians 2:10?
2. As new creations in Christ Jesus what are we created for (Eph 2:10)?
3. How does Paul describe the 'worthy life' in Colossians 1: 10 – 12?
4. How may we be empowered to live this 'worthy life' (Colossians 1:9)?

RESPOND TO THE WORD

1. Thank and praise God that he is rich in mercy and that because of his great love for us we are rescued from the dominion of darkness, saved by grace from death, made alive with Christ, and brought into his Kingdom of light!
2. Ask God to remind us, his people in Cape Town, that we have been saved to do good works – individually and collectively as his church.
3. What are some of the good works that you have done that you need to remember, feel the smile of God on you, and give thanks to God for? To hear his 'Well done, Good and Faithful!'
4. What are some other good works that you feel God has prepared for you to do at this time in your life? Is there anything holding you back from these works? If so, ask God to make a way for you do these works.

NOTES:

DAY 6: PLACED

In today's reading, we see an aging, childless Abram setting off with Sarai his wife and his whole household and some extended family in obedience to a call from God to go to another, unspecified place. Tied in with Abram's obedient going was the promise that he would be blessed. In this passage, and others in the bible, we see that God sends people to specific places, in order that his plans may come to pass – in the case of Abram, God's plan to bless all nations.

READ THE WORD

Genesis 12:1-9

DISCOVER THE WORD

1. What did God ask Abram to leave (vs 12)?
2. In what ways can we discern in this passage just how Abram followed God after he had been instructed to leave his homeland and go somewhere else (vs 4-8)?
3. Verse 8 tells us that Abram 'called on the name of the LORD'. What might he have called on the Lord about, at this point in his journey of obedience?

RESPOND TO THE WORD

1. Thank and praise God that he is a God who calls and sends people to specific places in order to release his blessing through them in that place.
2. Ask God to stir up his people to have a renewed sense of calling to the places that God would have them be a blessing, especially in this city.
3. Do you feel called by God to a specific place? You may already be in that place, or it may be a call you still need to respond to. It might be an area of our city, or a place far away. It may be a place of work or study, or a place where people need to know the love & grace of Jesus Christ. If you don't have a sense of being called to a specific place, ask God if there is somewhere specific he wants to place you, or if he wants to affirm the place where you are.
4. Perhaps you do feel called by God to a specific place, but the prospect of leaving all that you know for some as yet ill-defined destination is too daunting. Like Abram, between Bethel and Ai, call on the Lord for courage, faith and direction.

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DAY 7: SEEING WITH THE EYES OF FAITH

When God calls us to a place, it is wise - as Moses did - to gather information about the place before 'settling' there. However, how we gather, interpret and share that information is often informed by our motives and level of faith. In this passage, we see how Caleb came to a different conclusion to 10 other people who were all presented with the same information.

READ THE WORD

Numbers 13

DISCOVER THE WORD

1. Why do you think the Lord told Moses to send a group of leaders to explore the land he was to give them (vs 1-15)?
2. Meditate for a few moments on the checklist of information that Moses gave the 12 men to bring back with them (vs 17-20).
3. Reflect on verse 30 where Caleb speaks about the new place with the eyes of faith as opposed the other 10 who speak with the eyes of fear (vs 31-33).

RESPOND TO THE WORD

1. Thank and praise God that he does not call us to blind faith but realistic, intelligent faith that takes account of the facts and yet is able to declare 'We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it'.
2. Ask God if there is any information he would have you gather and meditate upon regarding the place to which he has called you. Just as he clearly instructed Moses, listen and write down his instructions to you. Consider how you will gather this information and with whom you will do it, and with whom you will share it.
3. Have you been reading the information about your 'place' with the eyes of faith or the eyes of fear? Share any fears and lack of faith honestly with God and ask him to share his vision for your place with you.

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DAY 8: PLACED IN CHRIST

As we think about where we are called to be – that physical place where God would have us be a blessing and do the good works he has prepared for us to do - we can take courage from knowing that we are invited to be spiritually placed in, and connected to Jesus Christ. In fact, that is the only way we will be able to do the good works we are called to do!

READ THE WORD

John 15:1-17

DISCOVER THE WORD

1. Meditate on verse 4 where we are encouraged to remain in Christ, as he promises to remain in us. A beautiful picture of our mutual indwelling with Christ, as individuals but also collectively as his church.
2. If we remain in Christ, he promises that we will bear much, lasting fruit. It is for this that we are chosen and appointed (vs 5, vs 6). It is in this way too that we show ourselves to be disciples of Christ (V8).
3. Jesus tells his disciples to 'remain in his love'. Read verse 10 which tells us how we will remain in his love.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

1. Thank and praise God for the wonderful mystery that we are placed in him and he in us, that we live together in interconnected one-ness and it is from this place that we are assured of our fruitfulness.
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where you have been and are being fruitful. The devil comes to steal and accuse and he will try to discourage us and rob us of our joy by blinding us to our fruit.
3. You may be experiencing a time of pruning, or perhaps feel that you need to be pruned. Know that you can trust your loving Father to only cut away those things that are preventing you from even greater fruitfulness. If you feel led, pray to the Father and declare your willingness to submit to his pruning.
4. Ask Jesus if there is some particular fruit he would have you bear. Write down anything you may feel him saying to you, for continued reflection and discernment.

NOTES:

DAY 9: AGENTS OF RECONCILIATION

In Philemon, the shortest book in the New Testament, we have an example of Paul bringing God's grace and love into the difficult cultural context of slavery. Today's reading should inspire us, like Paul, to see where we can bring Kingdom ways into difficult social contexts, especially between fellow believers. (The back story here is that Onesimus was a slave of Philemon and he ran away and found refuge with Paul. Paul is now sending him back to Philemon – not as a slave but as a brother.)

READ THE WORD

Philemon 1 - 25

DISCOVER THE WORD

1. Note that this is not a private correspondence, but a community correspondence from one group of believers to another group of believers (vs 1, 2, 23).
2. Read verses 4 – 7 and see how Paul starts addressing this difficult conversation by affirming Philemon and his love for and appreciation of him.
3. Notice how Paul turns the established social norms upside down and asks Philemon not only to accept Onesimus back without punishing him, but in fact to accept him back as a brother and not as a slave (vs 13-17). In addition, Paul offers to personally cover any costs Philemon may have incurred due to this incident (18 – 19).

RESPOND TO THE WORD

1. Thank and praise God that he is a God who restores and builds relationships on the basis of love, especially between fellow believers and even when it cuts directly across the social norms of a society.
2. In today's reading, the issue was slavery. What are some of the modern day social norms that need to be relationally challenged on the basis of love?
3. Is there a role you can play in your context to be someone who helps facilitate a Kingdom response to a difficult social and cultural issue? Pray and ask God to use you as his person of peace and reconciliation wherever he has placed you.

NOTES:

DAY 10: OUR HOPE AND HELP

Today's reading is a wonderful psalm of praise about where our help and hope comes from. It comes from the Lord! Seeking justice and transformation in society can at times be very difficult and if our eyes are not fixed on God, but on the works of people and human leaders, we can become despondent, even cynical – certainly we can lose hope. Let's read this psalm in a way that helps us focus again on the source of our strength and hope.

READ THE WORD

Psalm 146

DISCOVER THE WORD

1. Who should we not put our trust in? Why? (Vs 3 – 4).
2. Who might some modern day 'princes' be in our context?
3. What are we if our help and hope is in the Lord God (vs 5)?
4. Verse 10 tells us that 'The Lord reigns for ever'. Reflect on verses 6 – 9 and see how active this reign is and where his attention lies.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

1. Thank and praise God that he reigns forever and that he cares about those who are oppressed and without provision and protection.
2. Ask God to continue to frustrate and bring an end to the ways of the wicked that are causing suffering, especially to the innocent and the weak.
3. Who are the oppressed in our city? Why do you think they are oppressed? Ask God to give you his insights and understanding.
4. If you feel that you have lost hope, spend some time letting the truth of the word 'The Lord reigns forever' soak into your spirit.

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DAY 11: GOD'S CURE FOR POVERTY

Today's reading is directed at the non-poor, those who have economic power. It is this group who, according to God, are responsible for breaking the cycle of poverty. God, in his understanding of humans, knew that over time people would separate into non-poor and poor and some people would become bound by debt. However, God does not want people to become stuck in debt and economic powerlessness. So his command was that every seven years debts should be cancelled and the 'playing fields levelled'. In this way, people could live in hope of being free from debt and poverty in the foreseeable future and would know that their children and grandchildren would not be stuck in a multi-generational poverty trap.

READ THE WORD

Deuteronomy 15: 1 - 11

DISCOVER THE WORD

1. What three words would you use to explain the overarching tone of this passage?
2. What does God command us not to do, in verse 7, and to do in verse 8?
3. Consider how this passage and this ancient law beautifully foreshadowed how God would cancel our debt of sin through his Son, Jesus' death and resurrection.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

1. Thank and praise God that he has strategies for tackling poverty and that he shares these strategies with us.
2. Pray and ask God that the non-poor would '...not be hard hearted or tight fisted toward [the poor]'. Pray that the people of our city would have the basic provisions for life - food, shelter, acceptance, work, hope of a better life. Pray that both poor and non-poor would know the riches of knowing Christ.
3. What might proclaiming the Lord's release (vs 2) look like today in South Africa or even in the world?
4. Is there a specific person or cause where you feel God is asking you to 'open your hand'?

NOTES:

DAY 12: RULES FOR LIVING JUSTICE

Today's Old Testament passage speaks to our personal ethical behaviour, which of course has a direct impact on the way we live justice. We know that we live under the New Covenant, not under the Law. Through Jesus' death and resurrection we are assured of forgiveness if we confess our sins. However, as those called to live in Christ's Kingdom, we can draw richly from the Law that God gave his people Israel and use this to help form our values and guide our behaviour.

READ THE WORD

Leviticus 19:9-18

DISCOVER THE WORD

1. What are the specific commands about how we should relate to our neighbour (vs 12, 15, 16, 17, 18)? See how everything is summarised in verse 18b 'But love your neighbour as yourself'.
2. Be reminded of Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (see Luke 10:25 – 37) that our neighbour includes any and every person that God brings across our path.
3. Meditate on God's special concern for people with disabilities (vs 14).

RESPOND TO THE WORD

1. Thank and praise God for his timeless compassion, wisdom and guidance expressed in this passage of scripture. Thank him that as a loving Father he instructs us in the way we should go.
2. Ask God to lead all people in our city to seek the high values and ethical behaviour laid out in this passage, especially those people who are in positions of power and privilege.
3. How can you help to ensure that no stumbling-blocks are placed before people who live with the added burden of a physical disability?
4. What is your 'harvest of the land', your field? How can you not reap to the edges nor pick up fallen fruit and ensure something for the poor and the foreigner. If you are not sure, put this question to the Lord and await, possibly over time, his reply and guidance in this matter.

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DAY 13: SALT AND LIGHT

In seeking to live justly, we find lots of direction and encouragement in the teachings of Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount is an example of such teaching which he gave to his disciples. The famous 'blessed are the ...' statements contain clues for us in living a lifestyle of justice – individually and collectively as a congregation.

READ THE WORD

Matthew 5:1-15

DISCOVER THE WORD

1. Read verses 3 – 12 and consider these 'blessed' statements. How would living in the truth and reality of these ways of blessedness help to bring Godly justice to the world in greater measure? (A clue to understanding 'poor in spirit' mentioned in verse 3 is to read it 'humble in spirit'.)
2. Christ-followers are described as salt (vs 13) – which is a preserving and life giving substance that permeates whatever it is added to. (Think how the church in Cape Town might 'permeate' the city.)
3. Jesus calls his followers 'the light of the world' (vs 14) – words used in other parts of the bible to describe Jesus himself (e.g. John 1:9). Meditate a while on the amazing fact that we are the light in a sometimes very dark world, and what the implications of this role is for the church.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

1. Thank and praise God that he has given instructions about how we can be happy (or blessed) and how we can seek the blessing of others as we seek to be salt and light in the world.
2. In what ways can you be salt and light (that is, a life-giving and preserving substance) in situations of injustice that you are aware of in places where you live, work, study? How can you see yourself, your family or your congregation being 'added' as salt to circumstances that need to know Godly justice? How can you avoid losing your saltiness as it relates to issues of injustice?
3. If you are not sure how to answer the above question, ask God to tell you – if not immediately then over the next few days. Be alert to him speaking to you about this.

NOTES:

DAY 14: NO-ONE IN NEED

It is always interesting to look back to the church in its early formative stages and see how the Christians in those churches interpreted this new faith in Jesus Christ. In today's reading we see how they dealt with material possessions and those in their midst who were poor. Let's see what we can learn from those first Christians from nearly 2000 years ago.

READ THE WORD

Acts 2:42-47

Acts 4:32-37

DISCOVER THE WORD

1. How did the first Christians respond to their fellow Christians in need (Acts 2:45)?
2. It's interesting to note that church growth is seen as the work of the Lord, not the result of human effort (vs 47). But what are some of the things that would have made this early church one where people were being saved?
3. 'And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there was no needy person among them' (Acts 4:33b). Meditate for a while on what you see as the link between grace and there being no needy people. How do you think the lifestyle and unity of the believers (vs 32; vs 34b, vs 35) contributed to this?

RESPOND TO THE WORD

1. Thank and praise God for this early church, from where all our churches have grown, whose DNA we carry, and from whom we can continue to learn and be inspired.
2. Ask God to fill his people, his church, anew with this radical faith and lifestyle of the early church which resulted in 'no needy people among them'. A radical faith that spills out into the world and leads to many more coming to know Jesus as Lord and being delivered from hardship and suffering.
3. In what ways can you and your small group grow in one-ness in heart and mind in ways that are expressions of radical grace and generosity?

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DAY 15: RUNNING THE RACE OF FAITH

As we come to the end of this 15 day devotion, we focus on faith and perseverance, two attributes we need as we seek to overcome injustice. Today's passage also reminds us that we continue the line of faith of so many other heroes of the faith and for all of us, the fulfilment of our faith is yet to come. This will happen when Jesus returns and every tear is wiped away (Rev 21:4). In the meantime, we continue to live between the 'already' and the 'not yet' of God's Kingdom and that should encourage us all the more to 'run with perseverance'.

READ THE WORD

Hebrews 11:1– 12:3

DISCOVER THE WORD

1. What is faith (vs 11:1)? Note how 'hope' is embedded in this description of faith. How can we link faith & hope?
2. How is it possible to please God (vs 6)? There are several ways mentioned in this verse.
3. Read about the heroes of faith who have gone before us (vs 4 – 38). Which ones especially jump out at you? Why? Which ones encourage you and which ones challenge you?
4. Read 12:1-3 a few times and let a compelling picture of Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, form in your mind and in your spirit.

RESPOND TO THE WORD

1. Thank and praise God that here, in our city and at this time, we continue the lineage of faith in so many ways, including as we seek his justice for all people and seek 'his Kingdom come'.
2. Ask God to strengthen the faith of his people in the area of justice and transformation in our city.
3. Are there things that are hindering you from running a race of faith in the area of justice? Bring these things to God and ask him to help you throw them off and to help you fix your eyes on Jesus, the 'pioneer and perfecter of faith'.

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