

THE

MOMENT

OF

STEVEN J. LAWSON

TRUTH

ENDORSEMENTS

“In a world where so many vainly attempt to deny the truth—or deny that truth can be known at all—Dr. Steven Lawson reminds us, ‘Thus says the Lord.’ This is vintage Lawson—the raising of a prophetic voice keenly aware of the vagaries of the age and resolute in pointing us to the life-giving truth of God’s Word and the gospel.”

—Dr. Stephen J. Nichols
President, Reformation Bible College
Sanford, Fla.

“We live in the most anti-intellectual and anti-theological era in the history of the church, and that’s because the church has too often taken its marching orders from the culture. When the culture denies the existence of objective truth and the church follows the culture, then of course the church is going to turn away from loving God with her mind. We need men in the church who are committed to the objective truth of the gospel, and that is why I’m grateful that God has raised up Steve Lawson for such a time as this. His passionate commitment to the truth and the difference it makes in the Christian life shines through this work. I believe *The Moment of Truth* will serve Christians well as they seek to be faithful to the objective truth of God’s Word.”

—Dr. R.C. Sproul
Founder, Ligonier Ministries
Orlando, Fla.

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

STEVEN J. LAWSON

The Moment of Truth

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To Bill Dunlap

A long-standing, faithful friend who has encouraged
my ministry for almost forty years and
who helped me launch OnePassion Ministries

CONTENTS

PART ONE: THE REALITY OF TRUTH

- 1 **What Is Truth?**
The Reality of Truth in a Fallen World..... 3
- 2 **Your Word Is Truth:**
The Reality of Truth in the Inerrant Word 21
- 3 **Believable Truth:**
The Reality of Truth in the Written Word..... 41
- 4 **The Gospel Truth:**
The Reality of Truth in the Exclusive Gospel..... 65

PART TWO: THE REJECTION OF TRUTH

- 5 **War on the Truth:**
The Rejection of Truth by the First Couple 83
- 6 **Truth under Assault:**
The Rejection of Truth by an Unbelieving Age 103
- 7 **Compromising the Truth:**
The Rejection of Truth by a Worldly Church 121
- 8 **Marginalized Truth:**
The Rejection of Truth in the Christian's Life 135

PART THREE: THE REIGN OF TRUTH

- 9 **Preaching the Truth:**
The Reign of Truth in the Expository Pulpit..... 157
 - 10 **A Truth-Led Life:**
The Reign of Truth in a Believer's Walk..... 179
 - 11 **Truth-Ignited Worship:**
The Reign of Truth in the Highest Worship..... 195
 - 12 **Truth at the Judgment:**
The Reign of Truth in the Final Judgment..... 213
- Scripture Index 231
About the Author 237

Part 1

THE REALITY
OF TRUTH

WHAT IS TRUTH?

The Reality of Truth in a Fallen World

“Does absolute truth exist?”

The question is often asked by many today.

We live in a generation that denies any such notion of truth. The only absolute seems to be there are no absolutes, and the only truth that there is no truth. These statements are not theoretical, but, sadly, represent the mind-set of our postmodern world. We commonly hear people today say, “You have your truth, and I have my truth.” In the contemporary marketplace of ideas, personal opinions and crass pragmatism are the currency that buys and sells.

The blatant rejection of absolute truth is nothing new but can be traced many centuries back. We hear its denial echo through the corridors of time, all the way back to the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. The night before His crucifixion, Jesus stood trial before Pontius Pilate and engaged in a one-on-one

conversation in which Pilate's own denunciation of truth was clearly revealed. He had heard Jesus speak of His kingdom and proclaim that He was a king. Upon Jesus' assertion that everyone who was of the truth would hear His voice, Pilate skeptically retorted, "What is truth?" (John 18:38).

This is the age-old question that was voiced by Pilate as he stood face-to-face before the One who is Truth incarnate. This was not an honest question raised by one searching to know the truth. Rather, it was a defiant denial that there is any such thing as truth. Pilate's statement was spoken with utter contempt—a dismissive chide dripping with sarcasm. This rebuttal was intended to belittle the speculation of any truth claim in the world. Spoken with a harsh tone of derision, this pushback was a barbed jab by Pilate at the Lord Jesus Christ. It was intended to denigrate the idea that anyone—much less Jesus—could claim to know and speak the truth. Pilate categorically rejected the very idea of an exclusive truth claim.

This fundamental question "What is truth?" has reverberated down through the centuries and has continued to grow louder into this present hour. With increasing volume, we hear the repeated mantra, "What is truth?" The spirit of Pilate lives stronger today than ever before. This unbelief is alive and well on college campuses. It reigns in the halls of government. It legislates our public morality and reigns in our media. It teaches in many seminaries and stands in countless pulpits. We live in a culture that is relentlessly defiant of any thought of exclusive truth. In fact, our society not only questions the reality of truth, but it has become vehemently anti-truth. We

are tolerant of anyone and anything except one who claims to know absolute truth.

The elements of this conversation between Jesus and Pilate represent a microcosm of the battle that rages over the existence of God's truth in our world today. This confrontation begins with Pilate's emphatic rejection of truth, progresses to Jesus' affirmation of the reality of truth, and culminates with Jesus' assertion of the reign of truth in the lives of believers. As we view this dialogue between Jesus and Pilate through these three lenses, we are able to find penetrating insight and broader applications for our lives today. This threefold perspective will prepare us to effectively uphold the truth in our day.

The Rejection of Truth

In uttering the words "What is truth?" Pilate issued an unequivocal rejection of the existence of ultimate truth. This disregard of the truth is as grave a sin as it is ancient. We see it from the beginning of creation, when Satan the serpent first slithered onto the pages of human history and launched his original temptation to reject the truth. This was his attempt to create a world in which the rejection of truth would run rampant. The rejection of the truth is where sin began, and it continues to this day.

With this in mind, Paul writes, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth" (Rom. 1:18). Whenever the truth of God is suppressed, it always leads to believing a lie. "Because they exchanged the truth about

God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom. 1:25). This rejection of the truth is the demise of any individual life and the destruction of any corporate society. The downward spiral always begins with the rejection of the truth.

Continually and increasingly, our postmodern society has exchanged the truth of God for a lie. This egregious substitution has had serious consequences for people’s lives and for our pluralistic culture. Years ago, Allan Bloom, a noted college professor, wrote a book titled *The Closing of the American Mind*. As he instructed the brightest students of his day, he wrote that 95 percent of all entering college students were avowed relativists who rejected any notion of definitive truth. By the time they graduated, 97 percent of the students rejected any claim to exclusive truth whatsoever. No culture can long survive such a denial. This all-out refusal to recognize the truth is hitting our society like a tsunami, and its breakers have submerged the majority of modern minds.

One astute philosopher has said that we are raising a generation of “moral stutterers.” Others call it “moral illiteracy.” Yet another observer says, “There is a hole in our moral ozone.” This has produced an imploding world in which abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, pornography, transgender identity, and all manner of lewd behavior are practiced and approved of. This abandonment of moral values can be traced back to the rejection of the truth. When absolute truth departs, everything is up for grabs. Tragically, modern man now has his feet firmly planted in midair.

The supreme sin today, it seems, is not the committing of moral wickedness. Rather, it is making an exclusive claim of absolute truth. The unpardonable sin in this generation is to affirm moral absolutes. The abomination of the hour is to assert that the Bible is the authoritative standard of truth and to maintain that all that is contrary to the truth is a lie. Such is an anathema in the truth-rejecting world of the twenty-first century.

Many Claims for Truth

This defection from the standard of absolute truth has resulted in multiple truth claims. Humanism says man is the truth. Pragmatism says whatever works is the truth. Pluralism says everyone has a piece of the truth. Relativism says each situation determines the truth. Mysticism says intuition is the truth. Skepticism says no one can know the truth. Heathenism says whatever feels good is the truth. Existentialism says self-determination is the truth. Secularism says this present world is the truth. Positivism says whatever man confesses is the truth. This is the world in which we live—a world that rejects the claim of any absolute truth that is the standard for everyone.

This universal rejection of absolute truth is what we face as we live in this world. We are surrounded by the taunts of this world that question, “What is truth?” Maybe this is what you face in your work environment. Perhaps this is what confronts you at your family reunions. There is a strong probability that this is what confronts you on your college campus. And this is exactly what Jesus faced when He stood before Pilate. In this

sense, you are in good company. So, let us investigate how the Lord responded in His confrontation.

The Reality of Truth

As Jesus stood trial that day, He affirmed that there is truth. Moreover, Jesus maintained that there is *the* truth. He informed Pilate that His reason for coming into the world was to teach and affirm the truth. By this statement, Jesus claimed to have an exclusive monopoly on *the* truth. In fact, Jesus asserted that He Himself is the truth. The Apostle Paul affirmed this when he wrote, “truth is in Jesus” (Eph. 4:21). In other words, all truth is in Jesus Christ, who is the very incarnation and embodiment of truth.

How can we define truth? The word *truth* (Greek *alētheia*) means “a reality that is firm, solid, binding.” It represents that which has certainty and that on which one can rely. In a word, truth is reality. Truth is how anything really is. Truth is not how things may appear to be. Nor is it how we want things to be. Neither is it what opinion polls say something is. To the contrary, truth is the way things really are. What identifies its chief characteristics? There are eight reference points that help us distinguish what Frances Schaeffer called “true truth” from pretenders to the truth.

What follows are eight distinguishing marks of what constitutes the truth. Each is a critical link on a chain that provides us with a comprehensive view of the truth.

Truth Comes from God

First, truth is *divine*. That is to say, all truth originates with God. Truth does not come from man. It is not derived from this world. Nor does it arise from the collected thoughts of society and culture. It is not determined by the majority opinion. To the contrary, truth comes down from God above. God the Father is “the God of truth” (Ps. 31:5, NASB), God the Son is “the truth” (John 14:6), God the Holy Spirit is “the Spirit of truth” (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). All three persons of the Godhead are truth. In this sense, truth is Trinitarian. Each person of the Trinity is the standard of all truth, and They speak only the truth. Their words are true, and Their judgments are governed by truth. All three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—think, speak, and act the truth.

So, what is truth? It is the self-revelation of God’s own being—the self-disclosure of the nature, mind, and will of God. The author of all truth is God. He is the sole determiner of truth, the supreme governor of truth, and the highest arbitrator of truth. As the ultimate standard of truth, God Himself measures all things. All that is in agreement with what God is, says, and does is truth. In this sense, God is the final judge of all truth. Therefore, sin is whatever God says it is. Heaven and hell are exactly what God says they are. Salvation is what God says it is. Morality and the family are what God says they are. The Scripture says, “Let God be true though every one were a liar” (Rom. 3:4).

Truth is an out-of-this-world entity. It comes down from another realm. It comes from the character and mind of God

Himself. Therefore, if you are to know the truth, you must not look to yourself. You must not poll the world to find it. You must look to God and His Word as the only source of ultimate truth.

Truth Reigns Supremely

Second, truth is *absolute*. This is to say, truth reigns as the highest authority in determining all matters. Everything yields to the truth. Truth has the first word and the final say in every matter. In this sense, truth is sovereign. It is exclusive, not inclusive. Truth draws a sharp line between what is and what is not truth. Thus, truth is discriminating. Truth makes fine distinctions between what is right and wrong. It is never both/and but is always either/or. Truth is never relative, arbitrary, or conditional. It is always conclusive and unconditional. Everything outside of it is false by definition, while everything inside the truth is true.

By contrast, Satan is a liar and the Father of Lies. His servants speak his native tongue of falsehoods. He is “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4), “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31), and “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2). This evil world system is filled with his lies. Ultimately, there are only two fathers in the world, with two families. The first family is made up of those who belong to God, and they alone hear the truth. The second family has the devil for their father, and they reject God’s truth, just as Pilate did.

Truth Is a Fact

Third, truth is *objective*. That is to say, truth is propositional. It is stated in clearly defined words that have a precise meaning. Truth speaks with specific words that have a definite meaning. It is concrete, black and white, and narrowly defined. It never blurs the lines of distinction. It never speaks in ambiguous terms. Truth is never vague or fuzzy. It is razor sharp; it focuses like a laser beam. It is explicit, exact, and crystal clear in its meaning. Truth is factual, rational, and tangible. It is based not upon subjective feelings but upon objective facts.

Specifically, truth is contained in the written Word of God. It is expressed in actual words that can be studied and interpreted. And it is true regardless of how anyone feels about it. It is always true, whether it speaks subjectively to any given individual or not. Truth is truth either way. It does not have to be believed in order to be truth. When God speaks, He speaks what is truth. God has not stuttered or mumbled when He has spoken His truth.

All Truth Stands Together

Fourth, truth is *singular*. As Jesus represented the truth before Pilate, He spoke of *the* truth as one entity. The definite article *the* distinguishes it from merely being *a* truth. When Jesus asserted *the* truth, He was stressing that all truth is one system of revealed reality. Every piece of truth perfectly fits together into one body of divinity. Truth never contradicts itself. Truth is never at odds with itself. Truth never speaks out of both sides of its mouth.

Truth is never canceled out by another truth claim. What God says to one person is what He says to everyone else. Truth is never true for one person, but not true for someone else. Truth is always truth for every individual.

Frances Schaeffer wrote years ago, “Christianity is not just a lot of bits and pieces—there is a beginning and an end, a whole system of truth, and this system is the only system that will stand up to all the questions that are presented to us as we face the reality of existence.”¹ That is, the Bible always speaks with one voice, as it is always presenting one self-consistent worldview. Whenever the truth speaks, it makes the same diagnosis of the problem of the human condition. It sets forth one plan of salvation for fallen humanity. It presents one history of redemption for the ages. It offers one Savior of sinners to the world. It offers one remedy of eternal life. It presents one self-consistent worldview as the lens through which we see everything.

All of the sixty-six books of the Bible hang together. Each portion of Scripture speaks in perfect harmony with every other part of it. Like a finely woven tapestry, the threads of truth are perfectly interwoven throughout all the Scripture. If you pull a thread in Genesis, the Bible crinkles in Revelation. There is the golden cord of God’s sovereign rule over the world that is woven throughout the whole Bible. There is also the red cord of redemption that runs all the way through Scripture. Throughout

1. Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, in *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, 5 vols. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1982), 1:178.

the pages of the Bible, there is one consistent presentation of the truth. This reality affirms that truth is singular, never pluralistic, never in disharmony with itself. All truth is in perfect accord with every other truth. Therefore, what a person believes about one truth will indicate what he believes about a host of other truths because it is all fused together.

Truth Never Changes

Fifth, truth is likewise *immutable*. God does not change, and neither does His truth. What was true in the garden of Eden is true throughout the whole of the Old Testament. It remained true in the time of Christ and throughout the expansion of the church, and it remains true to this present hour. The truth never ceases to be. It remains true from one generation to the next, from one age to the next age. What is truth today never becomes untrue tomorrow. Right is always right, and wrong is always wrong. Society tries to redefine morality, and culture tries to reclassify right and wrong, but truth never changes its mind. It is unalterably fixed, permanently established, and unwaveringly constant. Truth rises above time and transcends the centuries. Truth is timeless, forever anchored and eternal.

The psalmist declared, “Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens” (Ps. 119:89). Isaiah 40:8 says, “The grass withers, the flowers fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.” Therefore, truth is always up to date, it is always contemporary, and it always addresses the issues of the day. Truth is never outdated, never archaic. It has a long shelf life, with no

expiration date. Nothing new can ever replace it, and it never becomes obsolete.

Years ago, I was a student in law school and stayed up long nights in order to analyze and scrutinize the law. One thing I discovered was that the law I examined at the beginning of the semester had often changed by the time I came to the final exam. It was frustrating to realize that I had invested so much time in studying a changing law. At that same time, I was beginning to study and preach God's Word. One day, it struck me that part of my attraction to God's Word is that it never changes. The investment of my time in studying the Scripture abides with me permanently and never needs to be updated or changed. I will never wake up one day and find that something that was once true will become untrue. Neither will there be any new truth.

Truth Makes Demands

Sixth, truth is *authoritative*. What God has spoken in His written Word is supremely authoritative. Nothing can overrule the truth. Truth is like an enthroned monarch who rules over our lives sovereignly. When the truth speaks, it drowns out every other voice. No philosophy, religion, or mere human opinion can cancel out the truth. Truth has the right to make assertive demands upon our lives. Truth necessitates something from us. When the Bible speaks, God Himself speaks and summons us by His truth.

Truth is never intended to be merely interesting. It is never meant to simply stimulate our curiosity. Truth is never meant

to be an intellectual pursuit in itself. We can never tip our hat politely at truth and walk on our own way. Truth is never a suggestion to consider, never an option to weigh. Truth places a responsibility upon us to act. Truth has the right to make assertive demands upon our lives because it speaks with the sovereignty of God. It possesses the right to rule our lives and must be obeyed. Truth calls for our response.

Truth Cuts Deeply

Seventh, truth is *powerful*. It cuts us deeply, both convicting and challenging us. Hebrews 4:12 states, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” That is to say, the truth of the Word of God cuts to the core of our being. All other words merely lie on the surface of our lives. They massage our egos or tickle our fancies. But truth bears down and penetrates into the depths of our very hearts. Truth cuts to the bone. When we are pierced by the truth, it opens us up and allows us to see ourselves as God sees us.

Truth is so powerful, that it alone can save us from the wrath to come. Truth can sanctify us into the image of Jesus Christ. Truth has the power to strengthen the weak. It encourages the downcast. It guides the lost. It challenges the sluggish. It comforts the discouraged. Truth does what only God can do because it is the truth of God Himself.

Truth Determines Destinies

Eighth, truth is *determinative*. Your relationship to the truth charts the course of your life in this world. It defines how you will love your spouse, how you will raise your children, and how you will direct your business. The truth is a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path. Truth is so determinative that your entire being is marked by the truth. Ultimately, truth will have the say on whether you spend eternity in heaven or in hell. Your final destiny is determined by the truth.

By these attributes of the truth, we can discern its true nature. All that is not in alignment with the truth is at best in error and at worst a lie. We live in a day in which the world largely rejects the truth. As a result, we must clearly understand what the truth really is. As Jesus stood before Pilate, boldly testifying to the truth, we understand that we, who belong to Him, must likewise boldly stand for the truth as well. We must affirm the truth for the glory of God and the salvation of those around us.

The Reign of Truth

Pontius Pilate defiantly rejected the truth when he mocked, “What is truth?” This was in response to the words spoken by Jesus that had affirmed the certain reality of truth: “For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth.” Then, Jesus affirmed the reign of truth when he said to Pilate, “Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice” (John 18:37). Here Jesus spoke about the reign of the truth in the hearts of men and women. If all people have an aversion

to the truth, how does anyone receive the truth? Why do some accept the truth? Jesus explains in these words.

In no uncertain terms, Jesus stated that those who are “of the truth” will hear His voice. To be “of the truth” means to be spiritually birthed by the truth of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. This describes those who have been regenerated by the truth. They are those who have believed the truth and belong to the truth because they have been birthed by the truth. That is to say, they have been sovereignly regenerated by the Spirit of truth. The Apostle Peter wrote, “You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God” (1 Peter 1:23). The Word of Truth is the instrument that God uses to impart new life to the spiritually dead soul.

By this work of sovereign grace, God gives spiritual eyes to those who are blinded by sin in order to see the truth. God gives spiritual ears to hear the truth. He gives a new mind to understand the truth. He gives a new heart to receive the truth. God placed the Holy Spirit within us as His resident truth Teacher to guide us into all the truth. Jesus said that this is the case for everyone who is of the truth. There are no exceptions to this reality. The reception of the truth of God is necessary if it is to save and sanctify any person’s life.

To be “of the truth” describes those who have received the effectual call of God. This, in turn, has caused the truth of the gospel to be received and believed. God sovereignly draws His own by the power of the Holy Spirit so that the truth will break into their hearts with irresistible force. Suddenly, they are enabled

to see the spiritual truths to which they were previously blind and against which they were hardened. It is the work of God the Holy Spirit that causes one to hear the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ and to follow Him.

Ears to Hear the Truth

Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one” (John 10:27–30). The sheep hear the voice of Christ, while the goats remain deaf to this call. Mankind is entirely dependent upon the Giver of all truth to impart His truth to the human soul.

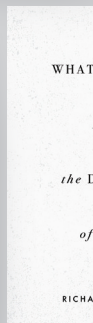
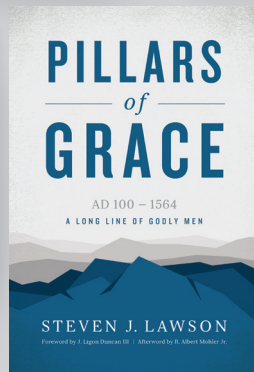
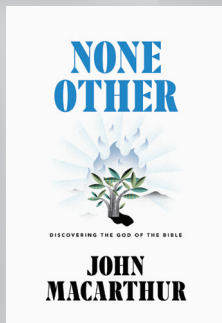
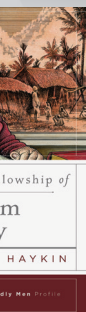
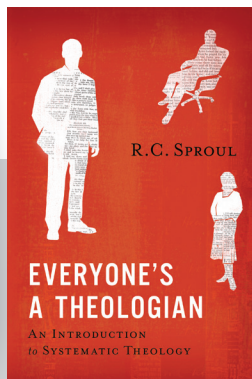
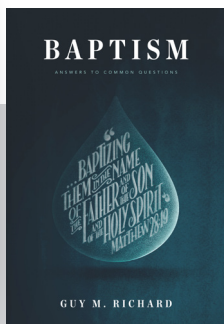
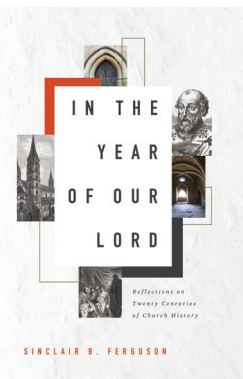
As we live in this world full of lies with people around us saying, “What is truth?” we who are of the truth know that Jesus came into this world to testify to the truth. The truth testified to us and set us free. Apart from the truth, people will remain bound in their sin. Only the truth of God is powerful enough to unlock the iron chains that imprison man and set him free.

These three major themes—the rejection of truth, the reality of truth, and the reign of truth—are seen in this encounter between Jesus and Pilate. They are likewise seen as we live in the world. We see the rejection of truth on a daily basis, whether in the world or, more surprisingly, within the church.

WHAT IS TRUTH?

The reality of truth calls us today through the living and active Word of God that bears witness to the gospel message concerning our eternal destiny. The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—this is our most noble pursuit in this world.

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“WHAT IS TRUTH?”

Pilate turned to Jesus and asked a profound question. It is a question that continues to be debated in our day. But it is one that God has definitively answered in His written Word and ultimately revealed in the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. Though the world may redefine truth or deny its existence altogether, it has been the duty and privilege of each successive generation of Christians to proclaim and defend the truth of the gospel to a world that desperately needs to hear it.

In this collection of sermons, Dr. Steven J. Lawson speaks into our cultural moment, helping Christians and skeptics alike answer Pilate’s age-old question.

“In our moment in human history, we must advance and hold the battle line secure for the next generation. We must be fully engaged as this war on the Word rages, seeking to uphold the standard of sound words and earnestly contend for the faith.”

STEVEN J. LAWSON



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