

THE Encourager®

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DAVE DRAVECKY'S OUTREACH OF HOPE

Discovering *Peace*

by Dave Dravecky



If we are called upon to suffer, we may be perfectly sure that we shall be rewarded for every pain and blessed for every tear. Underneath will be the Everlasting Arms and within will be the deep assurance that all is well with our souls. Nothing can separate us from the love of God—not death, nor life, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature.

A.W. TOZER

The Tozer Topical Reader

As strange as it may sound, I was at peace on June 18, 1991 when I was wheeled into the operating room for the biopsy and possible amputation of my pitching arm. I even joked about it as I said goodbye to my family. My surgeon, on the other hand, had much less peace about taking my arm. When I went into surgery, he was cautious, still hoping to save the arm. I was certain it was time for the arm to go, and I made that desire known.

During the previous months, my arm had become more than a nuisance to me. Sure, I had a limb hanging on the left side of my body, but I could hardly use it. I couldn't grasp anything. I could still write left handed, but only after I used my right hand to lift my arm into position and place a pen into my hand. Not only that, I had been fighting a staph infection for more than eight months. Months of antibiotics had failed to heal the open, draining holes in my flesh. My arm was leaking like a sieve. It hurt. Some days I felt better, then I'd feel worse. Physically, I was at peace with becoming an amputee.

I wasn't fooling myself by thinking, *This is going to be a breeze*. Not at all. I knew that when the arm was completely gone I would have a whole new set of problems. But at the same time, I had a deep-rooted peace because I knew that God was in control. I also knew He would give me the strength to get through whatever lay ahead. I was ready to move forward.

Even the process of the surgery affirmed to me that God was in control. The initial biopsy came back clean—no cancer! Based on that, it didn't appear necessary to take the arm. Yet upon further investigation, my surgeon, a professional with tremendous experience—one of the best in the world—was compelled to take the arm. It proved to be the right decision because the final biopsy confirmed that the cancer had, indeed, returned. I experienced a great sense of peace in realizing that God really did direct my surgeon's hand.

Despite the fact that I was at peace with God and was at peace with losing my arm, I was not prepared for what I was about to face. I thought I was much more

Peace

*I leave with you,
my peace I give you. . . .*

*Do not let your hearts
be troubled and do
not be afraid.*

JOHN 14:27



In some respects, the peace I had was shattered. It was as if someone had taken a beautiful piece of pottery and smashed it into pieces.

prepared for living as an amputee than I really was. It was one thing to face the physical challenges. I knew it would be hard, but that I could do it. But I had no idea of the impact being an amputee would have on my identity now that I was no longer a “whole” person.

In some respects, the peace I had was shattered. It was as if someone had taken a beautiful piece of pottery and smashed it into pieces. Instead of sweeping it up and throwing it away, however, they started putting the pieces back together.

The amputation shattered the peace of who I was. I had to look myself in the mirror and face myself. It wasn’t a pretty picture. I didn’t like it. But as I struggled, God took me, like a broken pot, and started putting the pieces back together—redefining who I was in His eyes, not who I was in my eyes or the eyes of others. I truly believe that God used the amputation as a way of forcing me to rethink who I was. When I was forced to deal with my identity, I experienced a deeper peace than I had known before.

That peace did not come without frustration. It did not come without pain. In fact, it came as a result of brokenness. It came through the refiner’s fire.

When the heat is on, when we’re feeling the pressure of suffering, we have to choose to seek God or to fight Him. Like most of us, I did some of both. I did my share of whining and complaining. I clawed and scratched my way through it, but I eventually faced the “big question.” It wasn’t about whether or not I was a

baseball player. It wasn’t about what people thought of me. It wasn’t even about the uncertainty of what lay ahead on my life’s journey. The question was about God and me. It was about whether or not I would trust God in the midst of the uncertainty of life.

I walked out of that experience saying, “Yes! God can be trusted. I can trust God for the strength to live life regardless of what it throws my way. Not only that, I can even trust Him for the ability to experience joy along the way!”

Discovering that I can truly trust God has given me a great sense of peace. That peace is not dependent on anything that happens in this life—not even on whether or not I survive. That peace rests in God and the promise He has made that I will spend eternity in heaven with Him. The real peace that is in Dave Dravecky is the hope of heaven, a hope made possible by what Jesus endured on the cross for my sake.

Having said that, I also have to tell you that although peace is always available to me, I’m not at peace every day. There are plenty of times when I’m in the midst of something difficult that I’m not thinking about the hope of heaven. There are still times when I’m scared, angry, and frustrated by what I have to face. So my peace comes in, then it slips away. It ebbs and it flows.

Even though I struggle at times to grasp the peace that God offers, that peace cannot perish. Just because I struggle doesn’t mean the peace is gone. I can always choose to refocus my thoughts on the truth that I can trust God no matter what. When I remember that I can trust Him, my sense of peace is restored.

So the ongoing challenge for me as I continue on life’s journey, is to allow that peace to be more and more a part of who I am as I face the challenges of life. My hope for you is that this issue of *The Encourager* will help you discover the peace of God so that you will experience His peace in the midst of life’s challenges as well.

The “big question” wasn’t about whether or not I was a baseball player. It wasn’t about what people thought of me. It wasn’t even about the uncertainty of what lay ahead on my life’s journey. The question was about God and me. It was about whether or not I would trust God in the midst of the uncertainty of life.

Discovering the God of Peace



Oh, how we need God to breathe peace on our planet. . . . May the peace of God go before you, leading you into each day. For whenever we look up into the face of our Father, whenever we quiet our spirit to hear His voice, we have found divine peace this crazy world can never take away.

Joni Eareckson Tada
The Encouragement Bible

When we face adversity we long for peace, we need encouragement, we hope for answers to tough questions, and we desire direction. When Dave and Jan faced their time of suffering, the Bible was their guide, the compass that pointed out a path through the confusion and doubts that surrounded them. As a result of their experience, they wanted to design a special edition of the Bible that makes it easier for those who face adversity to benefit from its wisdom and encouragement.

So, in conjunction with Joni Eareckson Tada, they have partnered with Zondervan Publishing to create *The Encouragement Bible*. This NIV Bible has features not found in any other Bible:

- ✚ Special inserts that address questions hurting people ask
- ✚ Inspirational reflections
- ✚ Practical encouragement tips
- ✚ Highlighted passages that are especially meaningful to those who are suffering

To view sample pages of *The Encouragement Bible* or to order a copy, visit our website, www.OutreachOfHope.org. An order form is also included inside this issue.

Peace

Understanding the Mystery

For many of us, the experience of peace is a bit of a mystery. We've seen people who possess power and wealth, people whose every need and desire appears to have been fulfilled—yet they have no peace. In contrast, we've seen people who have endured terrible circumstances, people who have been stripped of earthly comforts and security—yet they have peace. And in our own lives, most of us have known the disappointment that comes after a new relationship, accomplishment, or possession that we thought would bring us peace has left us with a longing heart.

We want peace, especially when adversity turns our lives upside down. Yet most of us experience far less peace than we would like. So what can we know about this mysterious experience? Can we identify what it is we're really looking for? Do we know where to find it? Can we attain it? As we unravel the mysteries of peace, we may discover that it's more attainable than we think.

What is peace? When the Bible speaks of peace, it refers to more than quietude or freedom from distress. The *NIV Dictionary* describes peace as "the presence of God, not the absence of conflict." The *NIV Bible Commentary* takes the idea a step further, defining peace as "the calmness of confidence in God," the assurance of "God's love and approval."

Where does peace come from? Peace doesn't come from a program, situation, or setting; it comes from a person and that person is God. From beginning to end, as in Romans 15:33, Scripture refers to God as the God of peace: "The God of peace be with you all." God is the only source of true peace.

What are the results of peace? Scripture describes peace as having great value—more value than wealth or prosperity: "Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife" (Proverbs 17:1). Peace helps us

endure hardships and has great health benefits: "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones" (Proverbs 14:30). In his book, *A Gardner Looks at the Fruits of the Spirit*, Phillip Keller says the peace of God produces healing. "It comes to bind up the wounds; to pour in the oil of consolation; to bring repose and quietness; to still the troubled soul; to speak peace to stormy spirits."

How do we have peace? Peace is a by-product of our relationship with God. It is not dependent upon our circumstances, so it can be present in the midst of chaos and great despair. Shortly after warning His disciples of His impending crucifixion, which certainly created chaos in their minds, Jesus said to them, "Peace I leave you; my peace I give you. . . . Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).

Peace also comes as a natural consequence of righteousness or right living. Hebrews 12:11 assures us that our struggles can result in righteousness and peace: "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

We can have more than one kind of peace.

First, there is peace *with* God. We receive this peace when we accept God's free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. This peace is attained only when the sin that separates us from God is dealt with—and that happened on the cross (see Colossians 1:19-20).

Second, there is the peace *of* God. This peace is possible through our ongoing relationship with God (see John 16:33).

Can we lose our peace? Second Thessalonians 3:16 assures us that God wants us to have His peace always, regardless of our circumstances: "Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way."

Although God wants us to have His peace continuously, the reality is our peace comes and goes. Sometimes we lose peace because we have sinned and we know it. At other times, we don't have a clue as to why we lack peace. So when our peace vanishes, we need to discern why it has vanished and set about seeking God and correcting whatever may be amiss in our lives. If we ask God, He will reveal what has undermined our peace.

The fact that we can ask God to give us His peace anytime, anywhere, and under any circumstances is a tremendous comfort. Such peace, when peace seems absolutely impossible, defies human logic. In his book, *Peace with God*, Billy Graham elaborates on this point: "A psychiatrist was quoted in the newspaper as saying that he could not improve upon the Apostle Paul's prescription for human worry. Paul said, 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 4:6-7)."



Dear Lord,
I desperately long for the true peace
That comes from You alone.
I have had the peace the world offers
And it is not enough.
It disappears like the wind. It doesn't
satisfy my soul.
Give me Your wisdom to help me see
The things in my life that rob me
of Your peace.
Then give me Your strength to
triumph over them.
Please grant me Your peace,
dear Savior.
Amen

The Ebb & Flow of Peace

by Jan Dravecky



... the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

"Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

MATTHEW 14:24-33

The story of Jesus walking on the stormy waters of the Sea of Galilee and calling Peter toward Him is one of Jesus' best-known miracles. It's a powerful image that is easy to describe and remember. It represents so vividly the choice we have when we face the storms of life.

When we pay attention to God and focus on Him, there is a sense in which we walk above the problems that surround us. It's not that we are no longer threatened. It's not that our pain is gone. The problems and challenges are still there, but we have hope and can remain peaceful in spite of the turmoil that swirls around us. The moment we pay attention to the storm and take our eyes off God, however, we lose our peace and begin to sink into the depths of whatever struggle we are facing.

I've spent my fair share of time sinking beneath the storms of life. At one time I thought it was impossible to have peace in the midst of a storm. There was even a time when I was so overwhelmed and desperate that I despaired of life. But like Peter, I've learned that I don't have to succumb to the storm. I have learned that I can be at peace even in the midst of the most terrible storm. I can be at peace because I can safely place my hope in Jesus my Savior, who is greater than any storm.

But I'm no spiritual giant. My peace ebbs and flows. Just because I can choose to focus on Jesus doesn't mean I always do. To be honest, I hate surprises. I like to be prepared. So when a storm hits, it initially throws me for a loop. I pay attention to the storm. When the shock wave hits me, I worry, I am afraid, I get angry, I feel guilty—I experience a whole list of peace busters. But I have learned that I don't have to stay there. I can choose to change my focus from the storm to my Savior.

The Scriptures say we are going to have troubles in life, but they also give

promises related to those troubles. So when I'm sinking, I consciously choose to remember the promises and faithfulness of God. I go through the mental exercise of remembering God's promises. I recall Deuteronomy 31:8, which says, "The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." I read Isaiah 43:1-3, so that I can be reminded that God promises to walk beside us through our trials. The words of Philippians 1:6 assure me that God will not abandon us, that He will continue to work in us. When I feel weak and vulnerable, I focus my thoughts on John 10:27-29 where Jesus says that nothing can snatch His followers out of His hand.

Those promises are the first things I call to mind. They remind me of what is true about God and my relationship with Him. Next, I remember what I have experienced in my walk with God.

I have lost my focus at times in the past and have felt that God's promises wouldn't be true for me, but I have also seen that God is faithful to keep His promises even in the most difficult circumstances. As I recall the monuments of God's faithfulness in my life, I can see that some of the biggest disasters of my life—things I never would have chosen—have turned out to be the biggest blessings in my life. By focusing on these memories, I am reminded that the challenges I face today, although still painful, are not the end of the story.

When I start focusing on God rather than on my situation—no matter how bad it is—an amazing peace overcomes me and I'm able to walk through the storm. This does not mean my situation improves or my pain goes away. It simply means I have peace in the midst of the storm. I have peace because I have hope. I have hope because God is trustworthy. I can trust His

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promises. I know He will be faithful to do what He says He will do.

The Bible tells us we will have trouble in life but that we can take heart, we can be encouraged, and we can have hope because God is the victor (John 16:33). Our hope is not in what takes place on earth. Ultimately our hope is in heaven. No one can take that hope away. Nothing can strip us of the joy of knowing that no matter what happens to us on earth, we will spend eternity with God in heaven.

When our hope rests firmly in God and our relationship with Him, we will have peace. But, like Peter, we sometimes lose our way. Something will happen that throws us off track. We may look away from Him, we may doubt His Word, and peace will escape us.

Just because we lose our way and start to sink doesn't mean we will perish. The secret to peace is being able to refocus our attention on God in the midst of the storm. When peace becomes elusive, I've learned to look for what has taken over my focus. If I am worried, for example, I know I need to refocus on the truth that God is trustworthy.

We're imperfect human beings. For those who call themselves Christians, learning to focus on God and give Him control is our lifelong pursuit. Peace is an overflow, a by-product of our relationship with Him. It is available to the weakest of us in the midst of any storm.



Peace Busters

What Can Hinder Our Experience of Peace?

✚ **Divine Disconnection**—God is the source of peace, so when I don't have a relationship with Him, when I don't think about Him or spend time with Him through prayer, worship, meditation, or reading Scripture, I've unplugged myself from the source of peace (Isaiah 26:3, 2 Thessalonians 3:16).

✚ **Worry-Warting**—When Peter bailed out of the boat to be with Jesus (Matthew 14:24-32), he walked on water just fine until he focused on the waves around him. As soon as he took his eyes off Jesus and focused on the surrounding storm, he sank like a rock. When my focus is on my surrounding circumstances, worry takes over and my peace will sink out of sight too (Philippians 4:6-7, John 16:33).

✚ **Wrong Reliance**—When I trust in my ability, in my strength to overcome or deal with my problems more than I trust God with my situation, I won't experience peace (Romans 15:13, Isaiah 26:3) or God's blessing (Jeremiah 17:5-8).

✚ **Consuming Conflicts**—Human relationships are important to God. Jesus told us to treat others the way we want to be treated (Matthew 7:12) and to resolve our conflicts with others before we pray or offer service to God (Matthew 5:23-24). When we have unresolved conflict in our relationships, our relationship with God suffers, which disconnects us from our source of peace (Hebrews 12:14).

✚ **Refusal to Release**—God promises His peace to those who present their requests to Him. When I don't hand my problems over to God, He can't hand His peace over to me (Philippians 4:6-7).

✚ **Borderline Behavior**—Righteousness or right behavior produces peace. The two are inseparable. When I mess up, hurt someone, or do something I know is wrong, my peace evaporates like water in the desert (Isaiah 48:18, Philippians 4:9).

✚ **Detrimental Direction**—God's peace is supposed to "rule" in my heart (Colossians 3:15). When His peace disappears, it's like a warning light telling me something is wrong. I may be heading in a wrong direction or considering a detrimental course of action (2 Corinthians 2:12-13).

God's Gift of Peace

by Dan Adragna



There was a time in my life when the peace of God was the farthest thing from my mind. I viewed religion as nothing more than a crutch for the powerless and pathetic. Over time my views softened a bit, and by the early 1990s I was a spiritual fence sitter. I felt there was probably a divine creator but considered the Bible to be more of a myth than a historical record of God's dealings with humanity. My view changed entirely, however, when I became powerless and pathetic as a result of an impending separation from my wife of 14 years.

We've all heard the saying, "When you're flat on your back, you can only look up." That's exactly what I did. With the guidance of a good friend, I reached up to God's extended hand and received His gift of salvation. He pulled me up off the floor, and I've been able to cast my burdens upon Him ever since. And I've had many burdens to cast: separation, loss of a long-term job, bankruptcy, foreclosure of our family home, and divorce. Yet these circumstances were just the beginning of the Potter's molding work in my life. On Christmas Eve 1995, I began yet another faith-building episode.

I had been sick for about a week with flu-like symptoms including a rash on my

left leg, fever, diarrhea, lung congestion, and a painfully swollen and sore throat. The last thing I recall was being wheeled into the admitting office of Dominican Hospital in Santa Cruz where I attempted to answer some insurance coverage questions. Shortly thereafter, I must have become unconscious because my memory escapes me. I woke up six weeks later in ICU.

Dangerous bacteria had entered my blood system causing a massive, toxic infection called septic shock. I am a diabetic, so my immune system is naturally weak and I was unable to resist the infection. Just for good measure, I had double pneumonia and contracted a staph infection as well. I was given a multitude of antibiotics and powerful drugs were administered to increase my faltering blood pressure. Within the first three days I suffered four cardiac arrests. My kidneys failed, and my temperature soared to 107 degrees for several consecutive days. I was put on around-the-clock dialysis and because I was no longer able to breathe on my own, a ventilator was attached via a trachea tube. My white blood cell count was too high, so I was given several blood transfusions. Due to a lack of circulation and other medical complications, my lower limbs were removed six inches below my knees in order to stop the growth of gangrene. Aside from all of the above, I was doing pretty dang good!

On the day I had two cardiac arrests, Pastor Rene of Twin Lakes Church was summoned to prepare my family for my certain death. But upon his arrival, Rene informed the staff that he and my family were not ready to give up. He told the staff that he believed God had a miracle in store for me, and that my family and church were going to pray for me. So every day a circle of loved ones held hands and stood around my bed, praying for a miracle.

Needless to say, their prayers were graciously answered. Over a period of weeks, as I was being weaned off the heavy

doses of morphine I had been given, I regained consciousness and became aware of what was happening around me.

As I awakened, I recall feeling a profound sense of contentment and joy. People were amazed by my gracious and joyful disposition. I don't know how to explain the awesome sense of peace I experienced. It certainly couldn't have come from me. The "old" Dan would have responded with anger, resentment, self-pity, and a "why me?" attitude. After all, I had an active, productive lifestyle. I worked as a union electrician. I had two teenagers to raise, feed, and house. I had marathons to run, tennis matches to play, and walks on the beach. I had women to meet! Despite my natural tendencies, I came to with a silly grin on my face and felt as grateful and content as could be. God had given me a new attitude as well as a new life.



The Lord has truly taken my lemons and turned them into lemonade, and I will be forever grateful. I've been transformed by God to be a living testimony to the power of prayer. I am living proof that God can give us peace in any circumstances.

My physician has no medical explanation for my survival. I can truly say that the fact I am alive is nothing short of a gift, a miracle from God. I have been reborn spiritually, and in a sense physically as

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well. That realization causes me to be so very grateful. I have a whole new perspective on life. I'm not in the rat race any more, I'm focused on God.

One of the first things I did when I was released from the hospital to continue my recovery at my parents' home, was to write my autobiography. If something happened to me, I wanted my children to know everything there was to know about me. That process helped me realize that God had saved me for a reason. It helped me realize that I have a God-given purpose for my life on earth and prompted me to explore what that purpose might be. Part of that purpose involves encouraging others with disabilities. In September of 1998, I was asked to help start a disability ministry at our church. It was implemented with guidance from Joni and Friends Ministries. In May of 1999, I was offered the position of Monterey Bay Area Coordinator for Wheels for the World, a program that collects donated wheelchairs, has them restored by inmates, and distributes them (along with the message of Christ's love, hope, and salvation) at no charge in developing countries.

Now that God has helped me realize my purpose here on earth, my life is not only well worth living, I'm actually more content than ever before. The Lord has truly taken my lemons and turned them into lemonade, and I will be forever grateful. I've been transformed by God to be a living testimony to the power of prayer. I am living proof that God can give us peace in any circumstances. I have been made an example of the peace He gives when we cast our burdens upon Him.

God has been so gracious in granting me His joy and peace. His peace has enabled me to find delight in the thought expressed in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: "Be joyful *always*; pray *continually*; give thanks in *all* circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (italics added).

Peace

Producers

What Can We Do to Seek Peace?

🕊️ **Trust God**—The Scriptures assure us that those who trust God will have peace. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace *as you trust in him*" (Romans 15:13, italics added). "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you" (Isaiah 26:3).

🕊️ **Obey God**—Peace is a by-product of obedience. "Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Corinthians 13:11).

🕊️ **Depend on God**—We can't possibly walk with God, much less obey Him, in our own strength or by our own efforts. Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Jesus Himself relied on God during His earthly ministry, "I do nothing on my own" (John 8:28). If Jesus had to rely on God, how can we do less?

🕊️ **Learn About God**—As we spend time in the Scriptures, we learn more about God, His character, what He likes and what He dislikes. That knowledge not only helps us better understand God, it will produce peace. "Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble" (Psalm 119:165).

🕊️ **Walk in Godly Wisdom**—God wants us to walk in His wisdom. He instructs us to ask Him for wisdom and promises to give it to us when we do (James 1:5). Peace is a result of walking in godly wisdom. "Blessed is the man who finds wisdom. . . her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace" (Proverbs 3:13-17).

🕊️ **Make Peace a Priority**—God wants us to pursue peace in our relationship with Him and in our relationships with others. When peace is our goal, we are less likely to do things that cause dissention and disrupt our peace. (See Romans 12:18; 14:19.)

🕊️ **Hand Our Concerns to God**—Presenting our concerns to God is a prerequisite for receiving His peace. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

🕊️ **Abide with God**—When we consciously decide moment by moment to invite God into our thoughts, when we look expectantly for His presence regardless of our circumstances, when we talk to Him heart to heart throughout the day, when we choose to believe He's with us even when we don't feel His presence, we are "abiding" with God. Jesus promised to give His peace when we abide in Him: "In *me* you have peace" (John 16:33, italics added).

*The LORD bless you
and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine upon you
and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace.*

NUMBERS 6:24-26



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