



Talking to Your Church About Homosexuality

A Guide for Pastors and Church Leaders
By Jeff Johnston

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Pastors and Church Leaders:

You're likely aware of the monumental shift in our culture in the past 40-50 years with regard to homosexuality and recognize the importance of this issue for individuals, families, churches and our world.

Focus on the Family believes this is a crucial issue impacting the Church today. We also know pastors and church leaders are busy and wear a lot of hats, so we've designed this guide to be a short, helpful resource. It offers some basic truths about the topic of homosexuality and ideas on how to approach the issue, whether you are discussing this with your church, youth group, Sunday school class or home group.

*Our goals are to **educate** Christians to know the truth about God's design for marriage and sexuality; to **encourage** believers to live as salt and light in the world, drawing others to Christ and engaging as biblical citizens; and to **equip** churches to offer grace and support to those with same-sex attractions and to their loved ones.*

Within each of the three content sections, we:

- Explain some of the basic concepts people should understand;*
- Discuss helpful approaches and tone;*
- Offer ideas for specific individuals who are likely to be part of your church; and*
- Provide links to other resources in areas where you may want to delve deeper.*

If you're not yet convinced of the need to address this issue within your church or sphere of influence, we suggest starting here: "[Three Reasons Why Pastors—and Other Church Leaders—Should Talk about Homosexuality in the Church.](#)"

We pray God's deepest blessing for you as you lead and shepherd your flock!

THEOLOGY AND THE CHURCH

ADDRESSING THEOLOGICAL CONFUSION WITH CLARITY AND COMPASSION

Spokespersons for Christ are those who have knowledge that no one else has. That's why they are the most important people in society. That is because they bring knowledge of what time and eternity are about. They bring knowledge on which people can base their lives. They bring knowledge that can be communicated to others on the basis of experience and reason and Scripture and grace and work and everything else you want to put in the bag.

— Dallas Willard¹

LAY A SOLID FOUNDATION

As a pastor, teacher or church leader, you are a spokesperson for Christ, called to be a voice of clarity, truth and compassion. This is especially true as you teach God's intentions for human relationships, sexuality and marriage. Before people can understand how homosexuality—and other sexual sins—miss the mark, they first need to know what the target is. What was God's plan for us in the beginning?

We recommend starting in Genesis 1–3, with the creation account, where we learn God created man in his image and likeness, male and female. He brought the first man and woman together in marriage, intending that relationship to be exclusive, monogamous and lifelong.

Marriage brings together the two halves of humanity—male and female—for union and communion, and to populate the earth with God's image and likeness. Marriage is the cornerstone of family, community and all society. Marriage also uniquely depicts the spiritual reality of the Church's union with Christ.

Humanity has been deeply marred by sin, impacting human sexuality and relationships. Homosexuality, in this context, is one of many expressions of broken, sinful humanity. In Romans, Paul illustrates the historical downward cycle of all humanity, as fallen man turned from God and His clear design for relationships. This is the world we are born into, a world where people—even believers—will struggle with a variety of sins and brokenness.

Thankfully, Paul doesn't leave the story there, but goes on to explain in Romans how God, in His mercy, reached out to redeem fallen humanity. We are saved and begin a transformation process as we put our trust in Jesus, follow Him and are changed by His Spirit.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES



TEACH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT MARRIAGE

We highly recommend downloading our two-part “Teach Your Children About Marriage” resource, which is designed to help children (and adults!) understand why God's design for marriage and family is so important.

[DOWNLOAD NOW](#)

WITHIN YOUR CHURCH

For some in your congregation, this may be a new message and the first time they hear of foundational truths about God's design for relationships, sex and marriage. They were born into a world where sexual restraints were broken down: a culture of cohabitation, easy divorce and fatherless homes. Teaching about God's intentions, with kindness and grace, is bringing water to the thirsty. For your convenience, here are some basic truths to develop and teach:

- The Bible is God's Word to us, expressing His heart for humanity.
- God created us male and female in His image.
- God designed marriage as the place for sexual expression.
- Both singleness and marriage have value and purpose.
- Sin has deeply affected every person, including our sexuality—damaging relationships, marriages and families.
- God deeply loves the sexually broken individual.
- In His goodness, God offers forgiveness, redemption, healing and restoration.
- God empowers and provides for us as we pursue Him, in singleness or in marriage.

Others in your church may have heard the truth; however, the consistent drumbeat by “[gay revisionist theologians](#)” has them confused about homosexuality and Scripture. Recent years have brought a flood of articles, books and videos questioning biblical teaching about homosexuality. Groups like “Faithful America,” “The Gay Christian Network,” “Evangelicals for Marriage Equality” and “The Reformation Project” host conferences and events that seek to overturn both Scripture and 2,000 years of Church teaching about same-sex relationships. **Some of these groups train attendees to go back to their home churches and spread the teaching that homosexuality is approved in Scripture.**

Almost every Christian college and denomination has activist groups working to advance this revisionist theology; “gay Christians” are encouraged to “come out” to their friends, families and churches. The strategy is to persuade Christians, through their relationships, to change their theology. The Church must be well-grounded in truth and love to overcome these efforts.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

Focus on the Family has a number of resources to help your congregation develop a biblical worldview.



[Focus on the Family's The Truth Project®](#) is a 12-week small group curriculum that covers a series of questions: “What is truth?” “Who is man?” “Who is God?” “What are the basic social systems established by God?”



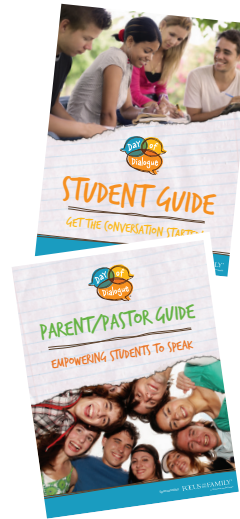
[The Family Project®](#) explores that last question more deeply, with topics ranging from marriage and sexuality to family relationships and how families can thrive and serve God.

Revisionist theologians typically don't address the Bible passages that explain God's design for sexuality and relationships. That's why we suggest giving people that solid foundation, *first*. Revisionist theologians usually turn right to what they call the "clobber verses"—those passages of Scripture that directly call out homosexual lust and behavior as sin. They try to reinterpret those passages, often through simplistic arguments or twisted logic, to say that God does not condemn homosexual behavior.

As a pastor or church leader, you will not only need to teach about God's intentions for sexuality, you will also need to speak the truth in love about sin. Scripture is clear that same-sex sexual relationships are sinful and that marriage between two men or two women falls short of what marriage really is. This doesn't mean homosexuality should be addressed in every sermon. However, because it is a key issue in our day, and attempts to redefine the Christian view of sexual sin are prevalent, homosexuality does need to be discussed at some point. You must explain why it falls short of God's best for us—just as pornography, lust, adultery and other sexual sins fall short.

Even as you lay a foundation of truth, your heart and your life are speaking. People are watching to see how you address these tough topics, so we encourage you to do so humbly and prayerfully, with kindness and grace. Your life and how you give your message is just as important as what you say.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES



EMPOWERING STUDENTS

Today's youth are bombarded—through education and entertainment—with unbiblical views regarding the definitions of gender, sexuality and marriage. Do the students in your church know God's design in these areas?

- Consider hosting a Q&A with the youth group during the Sunday school hour.
- Work with your Youth Pastor and parents to develop teaching on this issue.
- Download our free Day of Dialogue® Pastor/Parent and Student Guides for practical tools, tips and resources.

[DOWNLOAD NOW](#)

ENGAGING WITH THE WORLD

THE CHURCH HAS THE POWER TO TRANSFORM INDIVIDUALS — AND OUR CULTURE

For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor. —1 Thessalonians 4:2-4 (ESV)

DEMONSTRATING A CHRISTIAN SEXUAL ETHIC

In the early days of Christianity, the Church was countercultural. It taught and lived the biblical sexual ethic, showing a broken, decadent, abusive world a much better way: faithful, monogamous marriages and stable, loving homes. When a husband and wife loved and served each other, as Christ loved and served the Church, they were able to show the world God's design for family. When children were cared for and protected, the world saw that every life was valuable. As the Church grew, Christian sexual ethics influenced the culture, becoming more the norm.

As Rodney Stark explains in *The Triumph of Christianity*,² women and children weren't treated with love and respect in many parts of the Greco-Roman world at the time of Christ. Abortion was common and infants were often abandoned—especially infant girls—and wives usually had no say in the matter. Young girls were frequently married before they even reached their teens, often to much older men. It was commonplace for men to have sexual relationships with a mistress or with slaves, prostitutes or boys.

On the other hand, Christianity taught a high view of human life, children and women: We are made in the image of God, valuable and worth protecting. The early Church rejected pagan worship, which promoted abortion and infanticide. Christians rescued and cared for the infants, elderly and disabled who had been abandoned and left to die. This was unfathomable to the Romans, who saw mercy as weak and contemptible; the Christian sexual ethos helped transform the Greco-Roman world.

Can Christians make such a difference today?

Absolutely.

Pastors and teachers work to build up the Body of Christ. As you teach, guide, counsel and disciple, the marriages and families in your church become a testimony to the rest of the world. Churches that work to strengthen and save marriages play a part in spreading the Gospel. The sexual turmoil of the past 50 years has left a wake of devastation in its path. Now people are watching the Church to see if there's a different way, a better way. Let us be a light in a dark and hopeless world.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

SHARE WITH YOUR CONGREGATION

These three resources will help those impacted by homosexuality to better understand the issue of male homosexuality, to know what the Bible teaches about it, and to learn ways to respond with humility, love and truth.

[DOWNLOAD NOW](#)



WHY CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IS NEEDED

Christians face strong temptations to withdraw from cultural engagement and focus only on evangelism or “social justice” issues. Yet perhaps the most important social justice issue of our time is marriage. **Providing children with stable homes and a loving mother and father is the best way to alleviate poverty; reduce crime, drug abuse and sexual abuse; and to raise the next generation of healthy citizens.**³ In addition to demonstrating what healthy marriages and families look like, church leaders should speak out boldly for biblical marriage and against its redefinition. Encouraging your church to engage with others on these issues is vital, as we work to rebuild a healthy marriage culture.

Although homosexuality didn’t cause the breakdown of marriage and family, it is a symptom—and the redefinition of marriage will lead to even more decay and devastation. **Pastors and church leaders play a fundamental role in equipping the Church to stand against the collapse of marriage and its redefinition.**

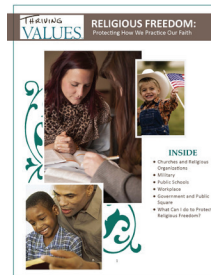
Activists often ask, “How does my same-sex marriage affect your marriage?” What they don’t openly acknowledge is that **changing marriage affects everyone and every facet of life.** As marriage is redefined, government—at all levels—works to support, teach and enforce that redefinition. This affects the education of children and teens, business practices, the media and entertainment, nonprofit organizations, language, free speech, laws and religious freedom.

Case in point: How Christian adoption agencies can operate. After the Massachusetts Supreme Court mandated same-sex marriage in 2004, Catholic Charities was forced out of the adoption business because they would not place children with homosexual couples. The Church is really the last bastion of resistance to embracing and celebrating homosexuality.

Homosexuality impacts more than just marriage and the family. **Some of the most detrimental impact to religious freedom has come about through the passage of laws that create special rights based on “sexual orientation and gender identity” (SOGI).** More than 200 cities, counties and states have passed SOGI laws, that elevate private sexual attractions and behavior to the same level as race, ethnicity, sex, religion and other protected categories.

Our fundamental opposition to these laws is that they are dehumanizing and reductionist—defining people solely by sexual attractions and behavior. Judeo-Christian teaching views people as much more than these. Secondly, they pit sexuality against other freedoms, especially religious freedom. When the two come into conflict, religious freedom often loses.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCE



UNDERSTANDING THE CULTURAL THREATS TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Focus on the Family has created this timely Thriving Values™ Religious Freedom

resource to help you better understand—and respond—to threats in five key areas of culture: Churches and religious organizations, the military, public schools, the workplace, and the public square. Learn how to protect your First Amendment freedom — and so much more. Download this FREE Religious Freedom Resource.

[DOWNLOAD NOW](#)

For years these laws were passed under the radar, without real input or discussion. More recently, they have been highly contested, and Christian pastors have been instrumental in working to overturn them. This can be as simple as explaining to a congregation what SOGI laws do and how they impact religious freedom. Rev. John Lindell of James River Church in Missouri, for example, encouraged his church members to repeal such an ordinance:

*Addressing this topic or the subject of the upcoming vote from the pulpit is not against the law in this country, although it may be in the future. Nor is it outside the parameters of a Gospel ministry.*⁴

In Houston, a group of pastors and their church members helped collect more than 50,000 signatures to defeat a similar SOGI ordinance, passed by the city council. The case received national attention. What's important is that pastors were speaking out for religious freedom and justice. **We encourage all church leaders to do the same.**

Again, how you speak about these issues is important. You are modeling both grace and truth for your congregation. Remember also that there's a lot of misinformation about homosexuality, so if you use statistics, stories or studies in your teaching, make sure they are accurate and from reliable sources.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCE

FREEDOMS THREATENED AND INNOCENCE LOST:

The Impact of Adding Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression (SOGI) to Statutes and Policies

Hundreds of states, municipalities and schools have added "sexual orientation," "gender identity" and "gender expression" to non-discrimination and public accommodations laws, ordinances and policies.

Although they sound harmless, religious freedoms are on the losing end when they come into conflict with these newly created rights. Such non-discrimination laws also threaten the privacy and safety of individuals. We've listed online a few examples of a growing trend, as well as helpful takeaways for pastors to know, using the recent Houston, Texas ordinance as an example.

■ [READ NOW](#)

■ [WATCH NOW](#)

WITHIN YOUR CHURCH

We know pastors and church leaders are stretched. **The good news is this:** You don't have to do everything yourself. Within your own congregation, you probably have several people who are already involved in social issues. Encourage these members to educate and equip others on key issues.

Pastoral staff may need to help temper, at times, the language, tone or motives of members who are passionate about this topic. We all must remember that those struggling with homosexuality are not the enemy: Our words should be both compassionate and truthful. Scripture exhorts us time and again to “fear not.” As you engage with members on these issues, encourage them to be motivated by love for others, not fear and anger. This may mean calling for confession and repentance for our own sins, as well as praying for gay-identified activists and their allies.

Encourage your members to reach out with kindness to those who identify as homosexual. Some gay-identified people have misconceptions about Christians—either because they've been treated unkindly or because they don't know any believers. Media images they see of angry, wild-eyed, sign-carrying protesters certainly don't reflect the reality of most believers.

One pastor, Ken Smith, wrote a letter to an avowed feminist-lesbian professor after reading a newspaper article where she was quoted. He thoughtfully questioned some assumptions she'd made about Christians, scripture and the Christian faith and then invited her to meet and talk. Smith and his wife, Flo, embodied the “art of neighboring” when they connected with the professor and invited her over for dinner. **Rather than start a war of words, the pastor graciously opted for hospitality and dialogue.** The story of how that professor, Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, came to accept Jesus Christ is featured in the May 2014 issue of *Focus on the Family Citizen*® magazine, and in her book, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith*.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCE



AN UNLIKELY CONVERT

Professor Rosaria Champagne Butterfield thought she'd never enter the doors of a church. But she did enter the home of her neighbor.

Read this compelling real-life story, featured in *Focus on the Family Citizen* magazine, of how

Christians can take the love of Christ from inside the Church into homes and hearts of nonbelievers.

[READ NOW](#)

[SUBSCRIBE TO CITIZEN MAGAZINE](#)

REACHING THOSE AFFECTED

BY HOMOSEXUALITY WITH TRUTH, COMPASSION, HEALING AND RESTORATION

So Jesus said to the Twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”— John 6:67-69 (ESV)

SPEAKING WITH HOPE

Pastor Peter Hubbard leads a church in South Carolina. After almost 20 years of pastoring, he reflected on the testimonies of people in his church. People honestly confessed and repented of many sins—pornography, alcohol abuse, adultery, lying, hypocrisy, anxiety and more. And his church would always respond with grace, love and prayer. Yet something was missing.

As he writes in *Love Into Light*

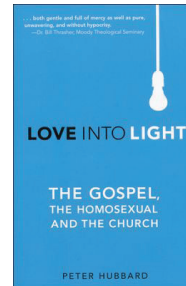
But in all those services, I could not remember one time when someone said, “I am battling with SSA [same-sex attraction]. Please pray for me.” We had heard hundreds of miraculous testimonies of Christ’s saving power, but none of them had included even a passing reference to homosexuality. . . . I also began to realize my failure as the teaching pastor. I regularly told stories and made applications through sermons to help our people apply God’s word to everyday lives. Yet I could not remember giving an illustration or application specifically aimed at helping those who battle SSA.⁵

In response, Hubbard developed a good model for pastors looking for ways to introduce homosexuality into the conversation of the Church. While clear about the sin of homosexuality, Hubbard is also honest about the damage done when a church is silent about this issue. He lays out in his book a flexible, feasible church network of care for men and women with unwanted homosexuality that involves small groups, counseling and discipleship. He is honest about the sinfulness of all human hearts, but also about God’s antidote for all of our hearts:

What if homosexuality is not a threat but an opportunity? Could God use one of the most controversial moral issues in our nation to awaken His church rather than damage it? . . . But we need Spirit-empowered love to move toward those struggling with SSA without despising or excusing their sin, because their sin is our sin—our hearts are no different!⁶

If homosexual strugglers in the church never hear about the redemption, forgiveness and grace available for their sins, they may assume, “God is silent; He doesn’t care about my pain; I am forsaken; I have no hope of finding freedom from sin.” Such thinking easily leads to despair and to the rejection of Christianity. They need hope.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCE



LOVE INTO LIGHT: THE GOSPEL, THE HOMOSEXUAL AND THE CHURCH

Many Christians feel confused and divided between the call to love and the call for truth. And many who struggle with unwanted same-sex attraction feel alone and alienated by the Church. The time is ripe for God’s people to think and speak about same-sex attraction in a way that is both biblical and beneficial.

■ [ORDER THE PAPERBACK OR DOWNLOAD THE EBOOK](#)

WITHIN YOUR CHURCH

As a young teenager and all through my twenties, I struggled with pornography and homosexuality. I was a Christian who had grown up in the Church. Although I don't remember hearing any sermons about homosexuality, I knew same-sex behavior was a sin and God had designed marriage to be between a man and a woman. I longed for a wife and family, and, especially during the 80s, I knew about the increased health risks for men who had sex with men. I didn't want to identify as gay, but I didn't know who was safe to talk to about my struggle, and I didn't know what to do about my intense desires.

It wasn't until I was in my mid-20s that I found there were resources and help for those with same-sex attractions. Although conferences, counseling and books were a big part of my growth and healing process, another vital factor was the Church. Men and women in the Church came alongside me and loved me as I was—sexually broken. They disciplined me, prayed for me, spent time with me, listened to me and loved me. God used them to bring tremendous transformation into my life. Were it not for the Church, I would not have come out of the grip of homosexual sin.

Think about your own church. Since those who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual comprise somewhere between 1 to 4 percent of the U.S. population, a church of 100+ members will most likely have a few people struggling with unwanted homosexuality. Churches of a 1,000 or more will probably have between 10–40 people with same-sex attractions. Most don't talk about their struggles, suffering in silence and fear. Recent surveys show that younger people are experimenting more than ever before with same-sex behavior: The number of those struggling with this may be even higher.

Here are some loving, hope-filled truthpoints that can be shared with teachers and church leaders:

- Your same-sex attractions don't define you; you don't need to identify by them.
- You weren't born gay, nor did you choose your sexual desires.
- You don't have to act on attractions.
- Due to sin in the world, all people have sexual and relational struggles.
- There is help—both within the church and without—for those with same-sex attractions.
- You are not alone: We will walk with you through your struggles.
- God loves sexually broken men and women; He longs for a deep relationship with you.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

HOPE, TRUTH AND RESTORATION

Bring hope, compassion and truth to those in your congregation who struggle with unwanted homosexuality with these articles:

- [UNDERSTANDING SAME-SEX ATTRACTIONS](#)
- [LEAVING HOMOSEXUALITY](#)

- God loves you as you are; embracing His love will transform you over time.
- Change from homosexuality—like change from any sin—usually isn't instantaneous or a 180-degree shift.
- There are many people who have found freedom from having homosexual identity, behavior and even attractions; some remain single, while others are married.

In addition to those experiencing unwanted same-sex attractions, your church likely has many members with gay-, lesbian-, or bisexual-identified friends and family. Someone with a gay-identified child needs love, support and encouragement. A teen whose parent has just “come out” needs help dealing with confusion and pain. Siblings will also need help navigating their situation.

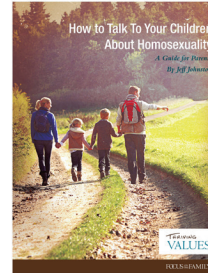
Christians can be so confused about this issue that they often don't know how to respond with both grace and truth. They're watching pastors and leaders for teaching and guidance. Thankfully, there are a number of good resources for friends and family members affected by a loved one's homosexuality. It's helpful to know, too, that if you address the issue of homosexuality from the pulpit or in a classroom, those struggling with other sexual issues will likely come and talk to you about their sins.

Pastors and church leaders help those wrestling with these issues by setting the tone and atmosphere for the entire church. As your talk to your church about this issue, it's important to do so from a position of humility and repentance—we all struggle with sexual and relational issues, and the truth is, some Christians have deeply hurt homosexual strugglers. **Teaching about confession, repentance and forgiveness is crucial to bring about healing.**

Speaking the truth in love is vital. Language and tone should reflect God's heart for strugglers—neither calling their sin “good” nor condemning them forever. As one woman noted about her own struggle, “Love me, but remember that you cannot be more merciful than God. It isn't mercy to affirm same-sex acts as good. Don't compromise truth; help me to live in harmony with it.”⁷

Speaking out on issues of homosexuality is not simple or easy. It takes courage, grace, honesty and willingness to walk alongside those in sin. But that's exactly what Jesus, the friend of sinners, did. He didn't compromise on either love or truth. Others are following you, as you follow Him.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCE



HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

Focus on the Family's latest Thriving Values guide helps parents address one of the most challenging political, social, moral and personal

topics of our day: homosexuality. Although this resource is designed for parents, the principles, real-life scenarios and possible responses are equally useful for grandparents, Sunday school teachers and Christians who have children in their care.

With Scriptural precepts in mind, the guide is segmented into three learning stages:

- Preschool (Ages 0-6)
- Elementary (Ages 6-12)
- Junior High and Beyond (Ages 12 and up)

■ DOWNLOAD THIS FREE KIT NOW

References

1. Dallas Willard and John Ortberg, *Living in Christ's Presence: Final Words on Heaven*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), p. 12.
2. Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity*, (New York: HarperOne, 2011) ch. 7.
3. See for example: "Why Children Need Both a Mom and a Dad" and "30 Years of Research: A Child Deserves a Mother and a Father."
4. <http://www.christianpost.com/news/megachurch-pastor-john-lindell-urges-church-to-vote-against-gay-rights-law-says-homosexuality-is-distortion-of-gods-creation-136331/>
5. Peter Hubbard, *Love into Light: The Gospel, the Homosexual and the Church*, (Greenville, SC: Ambassador International, 2013), p. 19.
6. Ibid., p. 15.
7. <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2014/12/14149/>; see also: <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/02/14388/>.

We want your values to thrive in today's culture, so we invite you to check out our online database of culture-related content at FocusOnTheFamily.com/SocialIssues and helpful resources at FocusOnTheFamily.com/PolicyResources.

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