

Thinking more of God



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

March 4, 2018

Discussion Guide

STUCK

CONNECTING:

45 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A WAY OF CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER SO THAT YOU MIGHT PARTNER IN THE WORK GOD IS DOING IN YOUR LIVES.)

- IN WHAT WAYS DID GOD MOVE IN YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS DID YOU RESPOND TO HIM?
- WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DID YOU INVITE GOD INTO THIS CHALLENGE?
- HOW HONEST HAVE YOU BEEN WITH US? (GRACIOUSLY THANK GROUP MEMBERS FOR THEIR HONESTY IF THEY STATE THEY HAVE HELD BACK.)

GETTING STARTED:

10 MINUTES

- HAVE YOU EVER FELT STUCK IN LIFE, PARALYZED IN THE FACE OF COMPLEX DECISIONS? WHAT WAS THIS EXPERIENCE LIKE? WHAT DID YOU NEED TO GET UNSTUCK?

DIVING INTO THE TEXT:

60 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A SIMPLE ROAD MAP THROUGH THE TEXT. FEEL FREE TO USE THESE QUESTIONS IN WAYS THAT BEST FIT YOUR GROUP AND THE DYNAMICS OF YOUR OWN MEETING.)

- USING THE NOTES, TALK ABOUT THE WISDOM AND ITS SOURCE AND PURPOSE IN OUR LIVES.
- READ DANIEL 5 OUT LOUD. SEEK TO IMAGINE THE SCENE

UNFOLDING. USING THE NOTES, PROVIDE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO FILL IN GAPS IN THE STORY. READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE.

- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DID BELSHAZZAR DEMONSTRATE AN ABSENCE OF WISDOM, AND ABSENCE OF UNDERSTANDING HOW TO NAVIGATE LIFE IN A SUCCESSFUL MANNER?
- DO YOU SEE PEOPLE TODAY NAVIGATING LIFE IN A SIMILAR MANNER? COULD YOU GIVE SOME EXAMPLES?
- DANIEL NOTES THAT BELSHAZZAR'S (AND NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S) LACK OF WISDOM STEMMED FROM THE PRESENCE OF PRIDE (DANIEL 5.18-23). HOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND THIS TO BE THE CASE?
- IN WHAT WAYS MIGHT HUMILITY OPEN A PERSON TO RECEIVE WISDOM? WHAT, IF ANYTHING, MAKES THIS PURSUIT OF WISDOM DIFFICULT?
- LITURGICAL WORSHIP (THE INTENTIONAL AND REGULAR REHEARSAL OF GOD'S STORY) HAS BEEN SUGGESTED AS ONE MEANS OF REMINDING ONESELF TO PURSUE GOD AND HIS WISDOM. CAN YOU THINK OF OTHER MEANS?
- WITH WHICH OF THESE MEANS DO YOU RESONATE THE MOST? WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO PICK UP THIS AND MAKE IT PART OF YOUR LIFE?
- CONSIDER CLOSING IN PRAYER, ACKNOWLEDGING YOUR NEED FOR GOD AND HIS WISDOM.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Wisdom

WISDOM TYPICALLY REFERS TO THE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ABILITIES A PERSON POSSESSES WHICH ENABLE THEM TO NAVIGATE THE WORLD IN A SUCCESSFUL MANNER. WHILE THIS DEFINITION DOES FIT CERTAIN BIBLICAL CONTEXTS (EXODUS 35.30-35), THE PRIMARY WAY WISDOM IS PRESENTED IN SCRIPTURE IS THAT IT INVOLVES THE ABILITY TO MAKE SOUND JUDGMENTS AS IT PERTAINS TO LIFE AND CONDUCT. IN OTHER WORDS, WISDOM ENABLES PEOPLE TO MAKE THE PROPER HUMAN RESPONSE IN ALL SITUATIONS.

WISDOM COMES FROM TWO SOURCES: GOD AND SELF-DISCOVERY. WISDOM WHICH IS GLEANED BY OBSERVING AND EXPERIENCING LIFE IS CALLED THE WISDOM OF MEN. WHILE IT IS HELPFUL, IN THE END, IT BRINGS PEOPLE TO EXPERIENCE GRIEF AND FRUSTRATION AS THEY SEEK TO NAVIGATE LIFE BECAUSE IT IS LIMITED IN ITS SCOPE (ECCLESIASTES 1.12-14; 2.9-11). HOWEVER, GOD GIVES PEOPLE WISDOM WHICH ENABLES A PERSON TO LEAD A GOOD, TRUE, AND SATISFYING LIFE IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES AND SEASONS. THIS IS POSSIBLE BECAUSE GOD ALONE POSSESSES WISDOM (JOB 12.13), AND HIS WISDOM OUTSTRIPS WISDOM WHICH COMES FROM HUMAN EXPERIENCE AND INTELLIGENCE (JOB 28.12; 2.21; ECCLESIASTES 7.23; 1 CORINTHIANS 3.18-23). GOD USED WISDOM TO CREATE THE WORLD (PROVERBS 8). THEREFORE, HE ALONE UNDERSTANDS HOW BEST TO NAVIGATE LIFE. HE WILL FREELY GIVE THIS WISDOM TO THOSE WHO SEEK IT FROM HIM (PROVERBS 1.7; 2.6; ECCLESIASTES 2.26), BUT HE WITHHOLDS IT FROM THOSE WHO DENY HIM (PROVERBS 14.6). THE PRIMARY EXAMPLE OF A WISE LIFE IS THAT OF CHRIST HIMSELF (1 CORINTHIANS 1.30) WHO DEMONSTRATES BOTH HOW TO OBTAIN WISDOM FROM GOD AND HOW SUCH WISDOM CAN LEAD ONE TO NAVIGATE LIFE SUCCESSFULLY.

THE TEXT

DANIEL 5.1-31: A LESSON LEARNED TOO LATE

THE STORY OF BABYLON'S FALL TO DARIUS THE MEDE (LIKELY THE THRONE NAME OF CYRUS THE PERSIAN) IS A CONTINUATION OF A LARGER STORY OF GOD'S RESPONSE TO PRIDEFUL LEADERS WHICH BEGAN IN DANIEL 3. NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S PRIDE FIRST CAME TO THE FORE WHEN HE MADE AN IMAGE OF GOLD AND FORCED HIS LEADING OFFICIALS TO BOW

DOWN BEFORE IT. HOWEVER, GOD RESCUED THREE HEBREW YOUNG MEN (SHADRACH, MESCHACH, AND ABEDNEGO) FROM NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S SENTENCE OF DEATH DEMONSTRATING GOD'S POWER OVER NEBUCHADNEZZAR AND HIS GODS (DANIEL 3). NEBUCHADNEZZAR THEN HAD A DREAM WHICH DANIEL INTERPRETED AS A WARNING FROM GOD TO RELINQUISH HIS PRIDE. HOWEVER, THE GREAT BABYLONIAN KING DID NOT LAY DOWN HIS PRIDE AND FOUND HIMSELF STRIPPED OF HIS SANITY AND THRONE (DANIEL 4).

AFTER NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DEATH, A SERIES OF SHORT-LIVED RULERS GOVERNED BABYLON UNTIL NABONIDUS LED A REVOLT AND HAD HIMSELF INSTALLED AS KING. HE PROMPTLY MARRIED THE DAUGHTER OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR IN AN EFFORT TO LEGITIMIZE HIS REIGN. NABONIDUS REIGNED IN BABYLON FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS AND THEN TOOK HIS COURT TO THE AREA WHICH IS NOW SAUDI ARABIA LEAVING BELSHAZZAR IN CHARGE OF BABYLON. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT BELSHAZZAR (DANIEL 5) IS A SON THROUGH NABONIDUS' MARRIAGE TO NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DAUGHTER. THIS HELPS TO MAKE SENSE OF THE STATEMENT NOTING NEBUCHADNEZZAR IS BELSHAZZAR'S "FATHER" (DANIEL 5.2). BECAUSE BELSHAZZAR REIGNED FOR OVER 10 YEARS IN BABYLON, HE CAME TO BE VIEWED AS THE KING.

IN 539 B.C., DARIUS THE MEDE LED AN INCURSION INTO BABYLON, DEFEATING THE BABYLONIAN ARMIES. THESE ARMIES FLED TO THE CITY OF BABYLON TO TAKE REFUGE INSIDE ITS ANCIENT WALLS. HERODOTUS CLAIMS THAT THE CITY COVERED AN AREA OF 120 SQUARE STADIA AND WAS SURROUNDED BY A MOAT AND WALLS 50 CUBITS WIDE AND 120 CUBITS HIGH. A CUBIT IS APPROXIMATELY 18 INCHES. IT WAS RUMORED THAT THE CITY HAD NOT FALLEN IN 1,000 YEARS. IT WAS RICHLY STOCKED AND DEEMED IMPERVIOUS TO ASSAULT. IN SEPTEMBER, AROUND SEPTEMBER 15, WHILE DARIUS' ARMIES SURROUNDED BABYLON, BELSHAZZAR HOSTED A LAVISH BANQUET FOR ALL OF HIS OFFICIALS. WE DO NOT KNOW THE OCCASION, BUT THE VAST NUMBER OF OFFICIALS PRESENT INDICATES THAT THE MAJORITY OF BABYLON'S ELITE HAD SOUGHT REFUGE IN THE CITY. WHILE SOME MAINTAIN BELSHAZZAR IS HOSTING A FINAL BANQUET TO CALM HIS ANXIOUS SPIRIT, IT IS MORE LIKELY THAT BELSHAZZAR IS CELEBRATING HIS SAFETY WITHIN THE WALLS OF BABYLON.

DURING THIS BANQUET, BELSHAZZAR DECIDES TO FLAUNT THE MILITARY MIGHT OF BABYLON BY CALLING FOR THE SACRED VESSELS WHICH HAD BEEN TAKEN FROM SOLOMON'S TEMPLE BY HIS GRANDFATHER NEBUCHADNEZZAR. TO CALL FOR THESE

VESSELS NOT ONLY FLAUNTS AN ATTITUDE OF INDIFFERENCE TOWARD DARIUS AND HIS ARMIES BUT ALSO TO GOD HIMSELF. WHEN THE GUESTS BEGIN TO DRINK FROM THESE VESSELS, A HAND APPEARS AND WRITES AN INDECIPHERABLE MESSAGE UPON THE WALL. WHAT WAS WRITTEN IS UNKNOWN BECAUSE WHAT DANIEL TRANSLATES IS ARAMAIC WHICH THE BABYLONIANS WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO READ.

THE CHIEF WISE MEN OF THE COURT WERE UNABLE TO UNDERSTAND THE WRITING WHICH INSTILLED FEAR IN BELSHAZZAR. HOWEVER, HIS MOTHER, ENCOURAGED HIM TO SEEK OUT DANIEL, A MAN WHO INTERPRETED THE DREAMS OF HER FATHER NEBUCHADNEZZAR. DANIEL, NOW OLD AND UNKNOWN IN THE KING'S COURT, IS SUMMONED AND OFFERED WEALTH AND POWER IN BELSHAZZAR'S REIGN, SOMETHING DANIEL REFUSES. HOWEVER, HE DOES AGREE TO INTERPRET THE WRITING. HE DOES SO BY FIRST REMINDING BELSHAZZAR OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S EXPERIENCE WITH PRIDE. GOD HAD GIVEN NEBUCHADNEZZAR POWER AND MIGHT, BUT THE BABYLONIAN KING HAD RESPONDED WITH PRIDE, SETTING HIMSELF ABOVE GOD. THE RESULT WAS GOD STRIPPED NEBUCHADNEZZAR OF HIS THRONE AND DROVE HIM AWAY FROM PEOPLE. HOWEVER, DANIEL IS CLEAR THAT WHAT NEBUCHADNEZZAR EXPERIENCED WAS NOT A TYPICAL COUP. ALL OF THIS TRANSPIRED WHEN GOD STRIPPED NEBUCHADNEZZAR OF HIS SANITY AND GAVE HIM THE MIND OF AN ANIMAL. THIS POINT IS IMPORTANT IN THE TEXT BECAUSE IT INDICATES THE RESULT OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S PRIDE. WHEN THE KING BECAME PROUD HE LOST HIS ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND LIFE AND HOW TO NAVIGATE IT AS A HUMAN BEING. TO UNDERSTAND LIFE AND NAVIGATE IT AS A HUMAN BEING IS CALLED WISDOM. IN OTHER WORDS, PRIDE LED NEBUCHADNEZZAR TO LOSE WISDOM.

DANIEL THEN LINKS THAT EXPERIENCE TO THE PRESENT. BELSHAZZAR KNEW OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S EXPERIENCE AND YET HAD BECOME PROUD, EXCLUDING GOD FROM HIS LIFE AS EVIDENCED WITH HIS TREATMENT OF THE SACRED VESSELS. RATHER THAN MAKING ROOM FOR GOD, BELSHAZZAR HAD TURNED TO OTHER GODS WHICH WERE IN FACT BLIND, MUTE, AND UNKNOWING. BELSHAZZAR HAD TURNED TO GODS WHICH THEMSELVES HAD NO WISDOM OR ABILITY TO NAVIGATE THE WORLD. THIS LEFT BELSHAZZAR IN A HELPLESS POSITION BECAUSE WITHOUT WISDOM HE WAS POISED TO LOSE THE THRONE LIKE HIS GRANDFATHER.

BELSHAZZAR REWARDED DANIEL AS PROMISED BUT THAT NIGHT

DARIUS' ARMIES BREACHED THE WALLS AND CONQUERED THE CITY KILLING BELSHAZZAR. DARIUS' GENERAL, UGBARU, DIVERTED THE EUPHRATES THEREBY ENABLING DARIUS' ARMIES TO WADE INTO THE CITY. BECAUSE THE ENTIRE COHORT OF OFFICIALS WERE CELEBRATING AT THE BANQUET, THERE WAS NO LEADERSHIP TO RESIST THE ASSAULT AND THE CITY FELL WITH LITTLE FIGHT. BELSHAZZAR'S PRIDE LEFT HIM STRIPPED OF WISDOM. FOOLISHLY HE FEASTED, LEAVING HIS CITY DEFENSELESS WHEN IT WAS SURROUNDED BY AN INVADING ARMY WHICH LED TO HIS DEMISE.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

WITHOUT HUMILITY, THE LIFE GOD INTENDS DOESN'T WORK. WITHOUT HUMILITY, LIFE FALLS APART ON EVERY LEVEL. I CAN SEE THIS IN MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MYSELF AND OTHERS, BUT SOMETIMES I OVERLOOK THE IMPACT MY PRIDE HAS ON MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. WHEN I PLAY GOD, I EXCLUDE GOD FROM MY LIFE. I GET IT IS HARD TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD WHEN YOU EXCLUDE HIM. WHAT I DON'T GRASP, OFTEN UNTIL TOO LATE, IS THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING GOD IN MY LIFE. GOD MADE ME, AND HE MADE THE WORLD. THAT MEANS HE KNOWS WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE FOR ME TO NAVIGATE THIS WORLD IN A WAY THAT LEADS ME TO A GOOD AND MEANINGFUL LIFE. WITHOUT GOD IN MY LIFE, I AM BEREFT OF THIS KNOWLEDGE, SOMETHING SCRIPTURE CALLS WISDOM. THAT MIGHT NOT SOUND LIKE A BIG DEAL. I SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIGURE IT OUT ON MY OWN, AND I THINK I DO A PRETTY GOOD JOB, UNTIL I DON'T. WHEN I EXCLUDE GOD FROM MY LIFE, IT DOESN'T TAKE LONG BEFORE I FIND MYSELF OVERWHELMED WITH LIFE. I FIND MYSELF FACING ANY NUMBER OF POSSIBLE CHOICES UNABLE TO DECIDE WHICH WAY IS THE RIGHT WAY, THE BEST WAY, THE WAY TO THE LIFE GOD MADE ME TO EXPERIENCE. I HAVE FOUND IT IS NOT ALWAYS BEST TO FOLLOW MY PASSIONS BECAUSE MANY TIMES MY PASSIONS OUTSTRIP MY ABILITIES. I HAVE FOUND IT IS NOT THE BEST COURSE TO TRUST MY GUT BECAUSE I CAN'T TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A GUT INSTINCT AND WHAT I ATE FOR LUNCH TODAY. I REALLY GET OFF COURSE WHEN I JUST DO WHAT I WANT BECAUSE WHAT I WANT IS OFTEN ALL ABOUT ME AND THAT NEVER GOES WELL. WHEN I EXCLUDE GOD I CUT MYSELF OFF FROM WISDOM, FROM THE VERY KNOWLEDGE OF HOW BEST TO NAVIGATE THIS WORLD AS THE PERSON GOD MADE ME TO BE. I AM NOT JUST LEARNING THIS. I HAVE LEARNED THIS LESSON MORE TIMES THAN I CAN REMEMBER. THAT ISN'T THE PROBLEM. THE PROBLEM IS NOT EXCLUDING GOD FROM MY LIFE.

I DON'T INTENTIONALLY EXCLUDE GOD FROM MY LIFE. I DO IT WITHOUT THINKING. I GET MOVING AND BEFORE I KNOW IT I LOOK UP AND ASK, WHERE IS GOD? GOD HASN'T LEFT ME. I HAVE JUST BEEN MOVING ALONG ON MY OWN STRENGTH AND POWER DOING IT MY WAY. I "LEFT" HIM JUST LIVING MY LIFE. YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THAT. I AM DISCOVERING THAT I NEED CONSTANT REMINDERS TO KEEP ME ATTENTIVELY FOCUSED UPON GOD. SCRIPTURE CALLS THESE REMINDERS WORSHIP. IN OUR MODERN SETTING WORSHIP IS SOMETHING WE EXPERIENCE. THE WATCHWORDS FOR MODERN WORSHIP ARE "EXPERIENCE" AND "INNOVATION." WE WANT TO EXPERIENCE SOMETHING EXCITING AND NEW. NOT SO WITH ANCIENT WORSHIP. THE WATCHWORDS OF ANCIENT WORSHIP WERE "REMEMBER" AND "KEEP/HONOR." ANCIENT WORSHIP INVOLVED THE REHEARSAL OF A RHYTHM OF REPEATED STORIES, FESTIVALS, AND SACRIFICES. THERE WAS NO SUCH THING AS INNOVATION IN ANCIENT WORSHIP. IT WAS ALL REHEARSAL, THE REPEATED REHEARSAL OF GOD'S STORY. WE HAVE A WORD FOR THIS KIND OF WORSHIP TODAY. WE CALL IT LITURGY BASED ON THE ANCIENT WORD FOR WORSHIP. IT IS THIS LITURGICAL WORSHIP WHICH I AM FINDING I NEED. I NEED THE REPEATED STORIES, THE RHYTHM OF REGULARLY REHEARSING GOD'S STORY IN ORDER TO REMAIN FOCUSED UPON GOD. I NEED TO BE REMINDED OF WHO GOD IS, WHERE HE IS GOING, AND WHERE I FIT. WITH THIS CONSTANT REMINDER A PART OF MY LIFE, I EXPERIENCE CONSTANT COURSE CORRECTIONS WHICH PULL ME BACK TO CENTER, BACK TO GOD. WHEN THIS IS A PART OF MY LIFE, I FIND THAT I AM ABLE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT LIES BEFORE ME IN WAYS I CANNOT EXPLAIN. SERMONS COME TOGETHER MORE EASILY. I CAN COUNSEL AND PARENT WAY BEYOND MY PAY GRADE. I FIND JOY AND PEACE IN THE EVERYDAY LIVING OF LIFE. IN KEEPING GOD FRONT AND CENTER I FIND I HAVE WISDOM.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

WE ALL WANT TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO NAVIGATE THIS WORLD IN A SUCCESSFUL WAY. SCRIPTURE CALLS THIS ABILITY WISDOM. SO, WHERE DO WE FIND THIS WISDOM? THERE ARE A NUMBER OF PLACES WE CAN LOOK. WE CAN TURN TO OUR EXPERIENCE, THE TEACHING OF OTHERS, OR SIMPLY APPLY AN ADEQUATE NUMBER OF BRAIN CELLS TO A DILEMMA OR ISSUE AT HAND. HOWEVER, IF WE WANT TO BE SUCCESSFUL, THAT IS, IF WE WANT TO NAVIGATE LIFE IN A WAY WHICH LEADS TO JOY WE MUST SEEK WISDOM FROM GOD. APART FROM THIS WISDOM WE WILL FIND OURSELVES EASILY OVERWHELMED BY THE MANY POSSIBLE PATHS WE MIGHT

CHOOSE. WE GET STUCK. GETTING WISDOM FROM GOD IS NOT DIFFICULT. GOD SHARES THIS WISDOM WHEN WE PURSUE HIM. THIS IS WHERE WE RUN INTO THE PROBLEM. IN OUR PRIDE, WE DO NOT PURSUE GOD. WE DO NOT FEEL WE NEED HIM. WE CAN FIGURE IT OUT ON OUR OWN. . . UNTIL WE REALIZE WE CAN'T.

SO, HOW DO WE PUT DOWN OUR PRIDE TO PURSUE GOD AND HIS WISDOM? WORSHIP IS THE SURPRISING ANSWER. WHEN I MENTION WORSHIP, I AM NOT REFERRING TO WHAT WE CALL WORSHIP TODAY. MODERN WORSHIP IS ROOTED IN CONSUMERISM AND THEREFORE IS FOCUSED ON EXPERIENCE AND INNOVATION. ANCIENT, BIBLICAL WORSHIP IS ROOTED IN THE REPEATED REHEARSAL OF GOD'S STORY WHICH INVITES THE WORSHIPER TO REMEMBER AND REALIGN HIS HEART. WE USE THE WORD LITURGY TO DESCRIBE THIS KIND OF WORSHIP. LITURGY IS JUST THE INTENTIONAL REHEARSAL OF GOD'S STORY IN A PARTICULAR MANNER. LITURGY CAN INVOLVE ANYTHING FROM THE REGULAR RHYTHM OF READING THROUGH THE BIBLE TO THE REHEARSAL OF A SCRIPTED CELEBRATION OF PRAYER. WHATEVER THE FORM, LITURGICAL WORSHIP INVOLVES THE INTENTIONAL REHEARSAL OF GOD'S STORY SO WE REMEMBER WHO HE IS, WHERE HE IS GOING, AND WHERE WE FIT SO THAT WE MIGHT REALIGN OUR LIVES WITH HIS. IT IS THIS WORSHIP WHICH CALLS US BACK TO CENTER, BACK TO THE PURSUIT OF GOD AND HIS WISDOM.

THIS WEEK WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO THINK OF A WAY YOU MIGHT MAKE THIS KIND OF WORSHIP PART OF YOUR DAILY LIFE. PERHAPS IT INVOLVES PARTICIPATING IN THE JOURNEY OR REGULARLY LISTENING TO A WORSHIP CD AT A SPECIFIC TIME OF THE DAY. YOU ARE FREE TO STRUCTURE THIS IN ANY WAY GOD LEADS SO LONG AS IT IS REGULAR AND INTENTIONAL. PAY ATTENTION TO THE AFFECT THIS HAS ON HOW YOU THINK AND NAVIGATE YOUR DAILY LIFE. YOU MIGHT CONSIDER JOURNALING YOUR EXPERIENCES.



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