

# BEYOND TODAY

The British & European Supplement

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## Where should our focus be regarding the news?

*The news is readily available to almost everyone. But are news stories always accurate, even-handed or useful? Might the news we see be missing something?*

**W**hile it is important to be informed about what is going on in the world around us, today's mass media can sometimes give the impression of being no longer either objective or trustworthy.

Reputable, accurate and impartial reporting of the news – be it local, national or international stories – is essential to the proper functioning of any community. Consequently, we who watch the news need to work hard at identifying reliable sources to follow.

News is available to us every day, around the clock, be it TV, radio, in print or via the Internet. Popular news presenters and commentators, many of them household names, are rewarded with lucrative salaries. But can we be sure we are being adequately informed about the importance of events that are being reported – or are we being misled?

The daily news is both ubiquitous and big business. There is a ready market for stories of all kinds, especially by online outlets where payments are offered to encourage the public to send in their photos, video clips, etc. Yet today there are identifiable challenges to the integrity of what has been termed the “fourth estate.”

“The term fourth estate . . . refers to the press, and news media . . . Though it is not formally recognised as a part of a political system, it wields significant indirect social influence. The derivation of the term fourth estate arises from the traditional European concept of the three

estates of the realm: the clergy, the nobility, and the commoners” (Wikipedia).

### Challenges to the integrity of the news media

Today the distinct concepts of news, celebrity and entertainment seem to have been blurred. They are all merged into one overall listing of stories, illustrated particularly in the online versions of news sources by imagery once deemed inappropriate. It is now not uncommon to find “news” stories based on television programmes or those who appear in them.

The news media do not simply report facts or present information. They are also campaigning, encouraging their audience to take up and support specific opinions or causes. Some of these may have merit, such as encouraging the public to reduce plastic waste. Others though have advantages and disadvantages which are played off against each other in the public arena, for example fracking.

Political news is often packaged as the adversarial interplay of individual politicians and commentators (sometimes termed “biff-bam”). This can result in the appearance of apparently contradictory facts or opinions within the same daily news outlet, or even the same article. The Brexit saga currently dominating UK politics provides an example of a story presented in terms of personality and viewpoints asserted as being either “hard fact” or part of “project fear.” This approach leaves the audience unable to form a reliable opinion.

The news media sometimes omit important elements of stories because they are perceived as not “fitting the narrative” the reporter wants to communicate. Other aspects can be omitted because they were reported elsewhere as “scoops.”

Serious and important news stories can often be found in the business section, where celebrity-based reports and politically adversarial items are less likely to appear.

### **Jesus encouraged His disciples to watch**

Towards the end of His life on earth Jesus Christ paused to view the impressive temple structure in Jerusalem. Jesus astonished those around Him with an advance news report that the massive stones with which the temple was constructed would not long remain one on top of another, news that became reality several decades later when Jerusalem, with its temple, was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

Luke’s gospel records Jesus saying on that occasion, “Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36). What did Jesus mean by “watch”? Luke 21:34 provides us with an answer: “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.” In other words, if we take Jesus’ advice, we should keep an eye on our own spiritual condition, making adjustments where necessary to our behaviour, our thinking, even to our way of life.

The story of Jesus’ journey with His disciples towards Jerusalem, with its temple and its walls, begins in Luke 9:51. In chapter 11 the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. In His familiar response Jesus encouraged them that their prayers might especially include the desire that “Your kingdom come” (Luke 11:2) and directed them to focus in particular on God the Father in heaven, whose name is to be hallowed – kept holy – and whose kingdom must and will come.

As that journey towards Jerusalem continued, Jesus had various discourses with His disciples. He explained to them the importance of always being prepared for the coming kingdom, since for most it would arrive unexpectedly. It was this aspect that Jesus was encouraging His disciples to “watch” – the need for their own ongoing and continuous spiritual preparedness for His return. To that end, Jesus had also instructed them, “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect (Luke 12:40).”

The news media will not help anyone to be ready in the sense Christ intended. In Luke 13:1-5, a report

was brought to Jesus’ attention. He was aware of it, and of another similar event. He then used the specifics to teach a general lesson regarding repentance. News items may ultimately be forgotten – except by those personally affected – but general lessons that spur people to change their behaviour will last for all eternity.

### **Watching the news . . . and our own spiritual condition**

Of late it seems traditional journalists, who are specialists in their fields and undertake their own original research, are fewer in number than in past decades. After all they are expensive to employ. More often now news items are directly quoted from press releases which organisations publish to highlight their own innovations, achievements or research. These can push their own viewpoints and agenda into the public domain and journalists might only rarely question or challenge them.

To follow the news, we are well-advised to be circumspect in our selection of news outlets. To stay informed we might follow a broad spectrum of news sources and opinion and be aware that it is important to be able to distinguish between fact and opinion.

In anticipation of the coming kingdom of God, Jesus is quoted in Revelation 16:15 as warning, “Behold, I am

***We should keep an eye on our own spiritual condition, making adjustments where necessary to our behaviour, our thinking, even to our way of life.***

coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.”

Disciples of Jesus Christ are to continually watch themselves so that they don’t exhibit any form of inappropriate behaviour and avoid the mindset that might encourage that behaviour. The apostle Paul wrote much about putting off ungodly characteristics and putting on those that reflect Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father (for example those we can find in Ephesians 4:20-32 and Colossians 3:5-14).

To study further the real news of what is ahead for the world and how to live through that time in a manner pleasing to God and Christ, please request or download our booklets *The Gospel of the Kingdom, Are We Living in the End Times?, Seven Prophetic Signs Before Jesus Returns* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.

*David Fenney*

# Impatience is acceptable in plants – but not in Christians

*People's attitudes can mirror aspects of God's design. That design can teach us valuable lessons.*

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**W**ith a reputation as an invasive weed, Himalayan balsam has infested watercourses throughout the British Isles. Saving graces are that it is very pretty and it is edible. Its hollow stems can be used as straws, its flowers can be added to salads or made into tea and its seeds used in curries ([www.wildplantforager.com/blog/edible-weed-how-to-eat-himalayan-balsam-flower-and-use-the-stem-as-a-straw](http://www.wildplantforager.com/blog/edible-weed-how-to-eat-himalayan-balsam-flower-and-use-the-stem-as-a-straw)).

Its Latin name, *Impatiens glandulifera*, identifies it as a member of the plant family to which the popular summer annual or longer-lived houseplant “Busy Lizzie” belongs.



Himalayan balsam in Sankey Valley Park, Warrington, Cheshire with seed pods ready to burst.

These have the common name “touch-me-not,” which refers to the explosive dehiscence (splitting along a line of weakness) of the mature seed pods which, when ripe, burst either naturally or when brushed by passing humans or animals, sending seeds several feet away. God designed this plant to disperse its seeds in an explosive manner.

*Impatiens* is the Latin for “impatient.” Those lacking self-control can react like the Himalayan balsam and explode along a line of character weakness.

## A link between impatience and anger

In his letter to the Galatians the apostle Paul describes many of the “works of the flesh” (Galatians 5:19-21) including “outbursts of wrath” where people explode – just like the Himalayan balsam. Paul then contrasts these with “the fruit of the spirit,” including “self-control” (verses 22-23). The Greek word translated here as self-control is “makrothumia.” It is more commonly translated as long-suffering, occasionally as patience. “Makros” means “large” or “long,” and the root word “thumos” means “temper.” Therefore, *makrothumia* literally means “long-tempered.”

Impatient people who are quick to get angry are often described as being “short-tempered.” They often exhibit their anger when they don’t get their way. We can reflect more of God’s righteousness by learning to be “slow to wrath” or long-tempered. The apostle James wrote, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:19-20).

Another Greek word, “hupomone” is usually translated as *patience*. Paul describes this patience as part of God’s character (Romans 15:4-6). It is the type of patience that is developed as we endure trials or testing circumstances. The apostle James captures this meaning in James 1:2-3: “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.” The patient endurance developed through weathering challenging circumstances increases our trust in God.

Someone exhibiting the godly character described by Paul and James, does not behave like the Himalayan balsam and explode with impatience when irritated or upset by someone else. To study further how we can allow God to transform our human nature into His nature, please request or download our booklet *Transforming Your Life*.

*Mark Webb*

# Idleness: A spiritual flaw

Many will be familiar with the saying, “The devil makes work for idle hands.”  
The spiritual implications of idleness are very serious.

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**I**dleness manifests itself in countless different ways. One common feature is that idleness will never produce any kind of harvest. It merely provides distraction or a temporary escape, leaving us unfulfilled, unrefreshed and oftentimes even more discontented and drained than when we began.

There are several different words translated “idleness” in the Bible, with a general meaning of “undisciplined slackness.” Dictionary definitions include “habitually doing nothing of real worth, importance, or significance; lazy, inactive or unused.” This is not to say that we should be constantly busy, without any recreation, but too much time spent on worthless activities or inactivity will not bring any good results. God gives His weekly Sabbath for additional rest and time to enhance our relationship with Him. On other days we can balance work, family and spiritual commitments with a little time for recreation.

In one of Christ’s parables the master pronounced a servant “wicked and lazy” (Matthew 25:14-29, especially verse 26). The book of Proverbs also has many verses repudiating idleness or “slothfulness” (for example Proverbs 6:6-11; 15:19 and 18:9).

## Wrong attitude, wrong result

Idleness is a foundation for many other sins. In his second letter to the Church in Thessalonica, the apostle Paul warned, “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, labouring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.’ We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies” (2 Thessalonians 3:7-11; New International Version).

It is easy to be led into wrong behaviours when we are not involved in worthwhile activity. Instead of wasting time in such things as idle gossip, which can lead to accusatory and judgemental attitudes, Paul instructs them, “And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good” (verse 13).

## Combatting idleness

A deeper awareness of the battle we face would combat any tendency to be idle. In these last days, Satan knows he has a short time, so he is doing all he can, including introducing many worthless activities, to increase our idleness and thwart the efforts of God’s people to accomplish the mission of preaching the gospel.

Individually and collectively we have a spiritual battle on our hands. The apostle Paul instructs Christians to be constantly ready: “Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:11-12). In this battle we cannot afford to be idle.

When the Jews confronted Jesus about healing a man

***As Christians we have been given the responsibility to proclaim the good news of God’s coming Kingdom to a world that has gone astray. That should be our primary focus.***

on the Sabbath, He responded, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working” (John 5:17). Later in the same chapter we read, “I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent me” (verse 30). It is clear that Jesus’ primary focus was not to do His own but the will of the Father. As Christians we have been given the responsibility to proclaim the good news of God’s coming kingdom to a world that has gone astray. That should be our primary focus.

Idleness implies there is nothing that is worthy of our time or effort. God’s people are kings and priests in the making, destined to rule and reign with Christ at His return to set up the Kingdom of God on earth. This is important and worthy of all our energy. In contrast idleness should, with God’s help, be rooted out of our lives.

*Ademola Adesupo*

# Three tips to diminish the impact of distractions

*Every life comprises only so much time. Some distractions may aid rest and relaxation, but allowing any of them to dominate wastes time and energy. Here's how to take back control.*

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**D**istractions are everywhere and take many forms, some helpful, some definitely not. A daily routine allowing time for Bible study and prayer can be hindered when circumstances change to a more erratic work schedule. All kinds of distractions can pop up causing good habits to lapse.

There is an interesting historical account in the Bible that provides some useful principles to resolve this issue.

## **Nehemiah's task**

Circa 722 BC, as a punishment for their rebellion against God, the northern nation of Israel was deported en masse into Assyria many miles to the northeast of Israel. They never returned, leaving Judah alone in the land God had promised their ancestor Abraham (2 Kings 17:18). A century later, for much the same reason, Judah too went into captivity, this time in Babylon to the east of Jerusalem. The city and God's temple were left in ruins.

God promised Judah that they would return, and

*“Walk . . . as wise, making the best use of time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-17).*

seventy years later this occurred under Nehemiah. When he set out to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem he met many challenges. There was the sheer amount of manpower and time needed to accomplish the task. Enemies were trying to destroy the people's progress. Nehemiah and his men needed to rebuild the wall and at the same time defend themselves.

He records, “So we laboured in the work, and half of the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared. At the same time I also said to the people, ‘Let each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard by night and a working party by day’” (Nehemiah 4:21-23).

The result was, “we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work” (verse 6). The people wanted to work

and put away all of the distractions in their lives and focused on the things that truly mattered.

There are three points that can help clear our spiritual and physical lives from the distractions that so often plague us.

## **Make a schedule and stick to it**

Control your day, or it will likely control you. With no schedule, general plan, or to-do list for the day, we get bogged down wasting time and energy making unnecessary decisions.

The apostle Paul wrote, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of time, because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:15-16, English Standard Version).

Just as Nehemiah and his men scheduled their work time, we too must schedule time to do what is important. A to-do list can help achieve goals such as scheduling sufficient time for prayer and Bible study or family time. Even starting with a small goal increases efficiency and helps build momentum. Goals can be built up slowly but surely. This helps develop discipline in our lives, which leads to upgrading our schedules and planning time even better.

## **Eliminate habitual sin**

Many things hinder us from our greater purpose in life, which is striving towards God's kingdom. Habitual sin and other hindrances drive a wedge into our relationship with our Heavenly Father. Every moment we allow the sin to linger drives the wedge in deeper.

Distractions may include money, the media, relationships, work and hobbies. These in themselves aren't bad but if allowed free rein in our lives can divert us from our true purpose. Nehemiah had to deal with those who were trying to profit from a difficult situation to the extent they were taking fellow Jews as slaves and charging interest on loans taken out to buy food (Nehemiah 5:1-13). This breached God's instructions to the Israelites in Leviticus 25:35-37. Those doing this were distracted by profit and were preventing others from working. Nehemiah made

them promise to amend their ways. With these sins addressed, the work progressed.

### **Make your good habits routine**

In time, actions we do repeatedly become automatic. We don't even have to think about doing them. A study by University College London had 96 people choose a common behaviour they wanted to turn into a habit. "On average . . . it took 66 days until a habit was formed . . . There was considerable variation in how long habits took to form, depending on what people tried to do. People who resolved to drink a glass of water after breakfast were

up to maximum automaticity after about 20 days, while those trying to eat a piece of fruit with lunch took at least twice as long to turn it into a habit" ([www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/02/how-long-it-takes-to-form-a-new-habit/](http://www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/02/how-long-it-takes-to-form-a-new-habit/)).

With the people's minds on the task, Nehemiah's routine worked. Likewise for us, eventually it will become automatic and almost impossible to forget. We need to decide what to change and then keep striving until we succeed!

Putting these three principles into practice can help us focus on what is really important – building our relationship with God and preparing for His kingdom.

*Dylan Reiss*

# **Spiritual guidance: Could we be missing the prompts?**

*Our responses to reminders by fitness trackers, phone alarms and other modern technology can mirror those we make to the promptings and guidance of God's Holy Spirit.*

**F**or nine consecutive hours in a day my fitness tracker reminds me to take a minimum of 250 steps. If I have failed to achieve the allotted number of steps, ten minutes before the end of each of these nine hours, it vibrates on my wrist and sends me a brief message regarding what I must do to remain on target. I know of others who have their phones set to remind them to take tablets at a certain time, to feed the dog, put on the coffee machine and so on.

I have recognised four ways I respond to these promptings and I assume other people's reactions fall into similar patterns.

Firstly, I can be so busy or distracted that I fail to notice the vibration, so miss the message entirely. Secondly, I can be aware of the prompt but choose to ignore it. Thirdly, I can recognise the reminder and read the message but then the phone rings or some other distraction occurs, and I forget to follow through. Finally, I can drop everything and concentrate on achieving the required steps to complete the hour.

### **How we respond to God's guidance**

Our responses to the promptings of God's Spirit can parallel those I make to my tracker. Sometimes, we can be so busy or distracted, or too far away from any connection with Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father to even recognise the "still, small voice" that is prompting, warning or encouraging us.

Secondly, we can become aware of the guidance but

choose to ignore it. Perhaps we are watching a torrid love scene in a film and the words of the seventh commandment about not committing adultery or Christ's remarks regarding lust come to mind (Exodus 20:14: Matthew 5:27-28). We can tell ourselves "I know it's wrong, but it has a good story line," or "It's just a film," not realising that such things can pollute our spirit.

Alternatively a positive suggestion to fulfil James 1:27 about helping those in need may present itself, but we put it out of our thoughts.

Thirdly, we might recognise God's guidance but find our attention drawn to something else. Before long we forget why we needed to change our activity in the first place.

Finally, we can heed God's Spirit in us, remove ourselves from any inappropriate distraction and throw out the wrong thoughts or perform the good deed that has come into our mind. If necessary, we can pray to God for the strength to accomplish these tasks and thank Him for His instruction. It is important, and respectful to our Heavenly Father, that we learn from this experience and be more careful of our choices in the future.

God's Spirit will not force us to respond and it can only bring to our remembrance those principles we have learned from Christ through the scriptures (John 16:13-14). To study further how God the Father and Jesus Christ work in us through the Holy Spirit, please request or download our booklets *The Power of the Holy Spirit* and *Is God a Trinity?*

*Barbara Fenney*



**Q** I don't believe in the immortality of the soul, but how do you explain Philippians 1:23?  
*Reader from Northern Ireland*

**A** In the passage you mention the apostle Paul states, "But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labour; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you" (Philippians 1:22-24).

To establish Paul's beliefs about the question of the immortal soul we can look at his first letter to the Corinthians. In chapter 15 he wrote that in "Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order. Christ the firstfruits, afterwards those who are Christ's *at His coming*" (verses 22-23). Since Christ hasn't come back yet, no humans have yet become immortal.

Later in that chapter Paul wrote, "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised

incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (verses 51-52).

The time when the dead will be raised to immortality is at the return of Christ (Daniel 12:1-3). Both Old and New Testaments teach that when God's people die, it is like a deep sleep (Daniel 12:2 and 1 Thessalonians 4:14).

With this understanding of what the Bible teaches on the question of man's mortality, Paul's reasoning becomes clear. At death he would enter a sleep that would last until Christ's return, when he would regain consciousness. Centuries or millennia might pass, but to the apostle it would seem like a split second of time. He would have liked to already be at the time of his resurrection but knew God still had work for him to do.

Our booklet, *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* provides more information on this subject. Please request a copy.

**Q** What is the location of heaven, where God's throne is situated?

FAQ

**A** The Bible mentions more than one place designated "heaven." Genesis 1:1 correctly translates the word "heavens" in the plural. Three specific heavens can be identified in Scripture.

The first includes the sky, the expanse around the earth where clouds form and birds fly (Genesis 2:1). By deduction, the second heaven is the vast expanse of outer space with its planets, sun, moon and stars – the universe. King David spoke of the physical heavens reflecting the glory of God (Psalm 19:1).

The apostle Paul said he had been "caught up to the third heaven" (2 Corinthians 12:2), i.e. to God's throne. In referring to Christ's ascension into heaven Paul indicates that the third heaven is outside the physical universe: "He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens . . ." (Ephesians 4:10).

In Old Testament times, the member of the God family who became Jesus Christ visited earth and dwelt in the temple in Jerusalem (Psalm 74:2). [Please request our booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* to learn more of Christ's pre-existence.] As a spirit-composed Being, God is invisible to the human eye (1 Timothy 1:17, Colossians 1:15). The apostle John tells us that no one has seen God the Father at any time (John 1:18). He also states that the throne of God is located in heaven: "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven" (John 3:13).

On numerous occasions Scripture refers to heaven as God's throne. From all the biblical indications, it appears that it is located outside the material universe.

## Let the Bible Answer...

### The Bible on immortality

God alone has immortality: 1 Timothy 6:15-16.

Immortality is a gift from God through Jesus Christ: Romans 6:23; John 6:44; 17:1-2. It is given to those who seek it in accordance with God's will and have His Holy Spirit living in them: Romans 2:5-9; 8:11.

Man is mortal and must "be clothed" with immortality: 1 Corinthians 15:53-54; 2 Corinthians 5:4.



## Letters From Our Readers

### Comments from *Bible Study Course* students

I have learned more from this Bible course and *Beyond Today* magazine than from a two-year study. Thank you.

*Student in Devon*

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share in this course of Bible study. I am grateful to have been able to study God's word in a meaningful way.

*Student in Kent*

Excellent course. Very inspiring. I have requested a lot of booklets.

*Student in Ireland*

I really enjoy reading your magazine. I was wondering if you do any courses by post that I could study. I can't get enough of learning the word of God. Thank you.

*Reader from London*

*Editor's comment: Details of our Bible Study Course have been sent to you.*

### Subscribers express appreciation

These are the best Bible books I have ever come across and I very much appreciate you sending them to me. I am unable to download the booklets as I don't do the Internet.

*Reader from Orkney*

Thank you for all the booklets you have sent. They and the *Beyond Today* magazine are of immense help in the study of the scriptures.

*Subscriber in the Isle of Man*

I can't thank you enough for all the reading materials you have sent me over so many years. I am sorry I don't have Internet, so can you please send me [the following booklets].

*Subscriber in Uxbridge*

Please keep sending me the *Beyond Today* magazine and the *British and European Supplement*. They are helping me understand the Bible.

*Subscriber in Kent*

Reading these magazines enlightens me and gives me confidence in belief in Christ as my Saviour.

*Reader from Hull*

### Accessible resources

May God bless you so much. I am a prisoner who draws strength and wisdom from your work. I wish I had money to donate to you. What I do have is my pen, so with it I write thanking you and pleading with you to keep up the good work.

*Name and address supplied*

Since subscribing to your magazine and newsletters I have found them interesting and enlightening. It is also very humbling to know these resources are easily accessible and available free of charge.

*Reader from Stockport*

### A need for repentance

Your magazine is a great insight on how our world today is so far removed from God's way, causing all sorts of suffering and pain to millions of people. It's a pity the world cannot see the error of their ways and repent before it is too late.

*Reader from Ireland*

## How this work is supported

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