

**BITESIZE BELIEFS**

The background of the entire cover is a detailed architectural blueprint. It features various geometric shapes, lines, and text typical of a technical drawing. Some visible text on the blueprint includes "3M²", "24M²", "10M²", "2500", "1500", "3450", "1900", "006", and "008".

# **INSIDE JOB**

## **LIVING FROM WITHIN**

**STEPHEN G. DERGES**

**[www.bitesizebeliefs.com](http://www.bitesizebeliefs.com)**

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## LIVING FROM WITHIN



## Dedication

The whole 'BITESIZE BELIEFS' series is dedicated to my wonderful wife Rosalyn – thank you for believing in me, trusting in me and loving me. I know that I'm a better man with you than I would have been without you.

## Acknowledgements

Many people have had a profound influence on my life and it's not possible to list everyone here. So, apologies if you are not specifically singled out – your reward will be in heaven!

Countless leaders, speakers, authors – many of whom I've not met personally – have inspired me and helped me develop and I'm profoundly grateful for the books, video and audio recordings and other materials they have shared.

I'm especially indebted to Carl Brettle, CEO of Neighbourhood Prayer Network (NPN), and his wife Rebekah who had the vision for NPN and launched the ministry in 2013 at Wembley Stadium.

Carl was the catalyst for me to re-edit the original editions of 'BITESIZE BELIEFS' and make this publication a reality – I appreciate your advice and faith in me. Do check out NPN's vision and ministry at:

[www.neighbourhoodprayer.net](http://www.neighbourhoodprayer.net)



# Introduction

Thanks for picking up this book. My prayer is as you read the words on these pages the Holy Spirit will quietly but forcefully speak into your life.

## WHY THE BOOK?

'INSIDE JOB' came about because I sincerely believe each of us has so much God-given potential and yet we often doubt the impact we can make through our lives.

This is one of a series of '*pamphlet type*' books I've written over the years to help people grow spiritually and, as you can see, it's not very long. It's not because I haven't much to say, but in this age of '*soundbites*' and '*instant makeovers*', I thought short, easy-to-read books would be more accessible. There are too many books on my shelves that I've started but not finished, so I've kept 'BITESIZE BELIEFS' condensed because I want them to be read.

Although I didn't attend Bible College or study for a theological degree, over many years I've been involved in various leadership roles in church, charitable, community and business settings. As Pastor of a Baptist Church and more recently, Chair of the Trustees and Leadership Team of an Independent Evangelical church, I've learnt a multitude of lessons – some painful – as well as known God's gracious favour.

## 'SELAH MOMENTS'

In every 'BITESIZE BELIEFS' book there are references to 'SELAH MOMENTS' – let me explain.

'Selah' is often used in the Psalms where the writer wants us to meditate on what's been written. The Amplified Bible translates 'Selah' as: *"pause and calmly realise what that means!"*

Often what we hear and read impacts us just in that moment, so throughout this book there are opportunities for reflection on the personal implications. And please don't skip over the Bible passages – God's word has power – take time to genuinely meditate on them.

So, find a comfortable chair, sit back, get a cup of tea (or a favourite beverage) and you'll be through this book before you know it. But hopefully the thoughts and challenges will last a lifetime.

Stephen G. Derges

# INSIDE JOB

Let me introduce one of my closest and dearest mates – Andy.

Andy and I grew up in a church in North Devon renowned for its Bible teaching and somewhat strict behavioural requirements. We were on the rebellious end of the spectrum and didn't always measure up to some people's perceived codes of conduct.

However, by God's grace and no doubt our parents' fervent prayers, we didn't turn out too badly. Additionally, we married well – our wives are incredibly wonderful spiritual women who have kept us on the straight and narrow and we got the pick of the bunch – genuinely!

Andy joined the Police Force and through dedication and determination, plus the desire to solve crimes and *'feel the collar of criminals'*, rose to become a

Detective Superintendent, often having the unenviable job of supervising murder investigations.

In most crimes, when trying to establish motive, means and method, Police Officers invariably scrutinise those closest to the misdemeanour – i.e. family members or in robberies, anyone with first-hand knowledge of the felony. The initial question on an investigator's mind is usually whether it's an *'inside job'*.

Frequently, culprits and victims are known to each other. In some cultures, so-called *'honour crimes'* are committed against relatives who allegedly bring shame to the family. Offences against children and women are commonly perpetrated by their supposed *'nearest and dearest'*. In repressive regimes, potentially non-compliant citizens are spied on and denounced, by family members or close friends, especially where Governments seek to obliterate Christianity.

Jesus said family division would occur because of faith in Him – ***"They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law"***.<sup>1</sup>

Obviously, this wasn't a universal prediction – not every Christian will be either ostracised or rejected by family members – but friends and relatives have the power to influence our lives.

The primary focus of this book though, is to consider another form of *'inside job'*



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<sup>1</sup> Luke 12:53



– how we ourselves frequently ‘shoot ourselves in the foot’ in the way we live. The ‘inside job’ we’re contemplating involves our attitudes, beliefs and thought processes.

EXCUSES, EXCUSES

Parents have undoubtedly heard the phrase, ‘It’s not my fault, (s)he made me do it’, scores of times as children attempt to evade responsibility for their actions.

But escaping responsibility is not exclusively the prerogative of children – adults also try and avoid potentially adverse outcomes. How many of us have tried to ‘cover up’ a misdemeanour and ended up compounding the problem?

It happens throughout life - in families, in friendships, in work environments. We all make excuses for our conduct from time to time.

Our litigious society endorses the ‘blame culture’ where millions of pounds are awarded in damages for defamation of character, libel or slander. Often innocent victims of violent crime, or those who suffer substantial injuries through accidents which weren’t their fault, receive far lesser amounts in compensation. Sometimes our priorities seem to be very mixed-up.



The Bible is very clear about accountability so let’s tackle our first ‘SELAH MOMENT’. If you’re new to ‘BITESIZE BELIEFS’, quickly look back to the Introduction to find out what I mean.

Consider the Scriptures, *below*, detailing a few aspects of personal accountability.

It’s not always comfortable to talk about sin and judgment, especially when linked to capital punishment, but I’m emphasising we’re responsible for our

<i>“Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin.”</i>	Deuteronomy 24:16
<i>“The person who sins is the one who will die. The child will not be punished for the parent’s sins, and the parent will not be punished for the child’s sins. Righteous people will be rewarded for their own righteous behaviour, and wicked people will be punished for their own wickedness.”</i>	Ezekiel 18:20 (NLT)
<i>“But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken.”</i>	Matthew 12:36
<i>“So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.”</i>	Romans 14:12

actions individually and the reality God hates sin. Why? Here are three reasons:

➤ **Sin separates us from Him**

Both Isaiah 59:2 and Psalm 5:4 declare God’s righteousness and holiness preclude Him from allowing sin into His presence. But there is a way out – through Jesus our sins can, and will, be forgiven.

➤ **Sin enslaves us**

In Romans 6, the Apostle Paul asserts Christians are released from bondage to sin and death, instead becoming *“slaves of righteousness”*. The Apostle says, *“the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”*.<sup>2</sup> How wonderful is that?

This isn’t exchanging one form of slavery for another. The reality is *“Christ has set us free to live a free life”*<sup>3</sup> – the freedom to fully appreciate all our Heavenly Father has provided.

➤ **Sin diminishes our view of and our love for Him**

1 John 2:15-17 (MSG) declares loving the world and its values, *“squeeze out love for the Father”*. Jesus said we can’t serve two Masters<sup>4</sup> – we must decide where we place our focus and attention.

According to Proverbs 6:16-19, there are six behavioural traits God hates and another He detests, *see below*.

All seven separate us from God, enslave us in sin and avert our eyes from the One

who requires us to live for His purposes. Take an impromptu **‘SELAH MOMENT’** to reflect whether any aspects need attention on our part.

**CHOICES**

Ever noticed some people take ages agonising over decisions whereas others take milliseconds to determine courses of action? I’m sure people come to mind who fit into various categories along this continuum and I’m equally confident other people imagine our decision-making prowess too.

Every day we make multitudes of decisions, ranging from minor life options with little or no long-term implications, to those having potentially serious impacts on us and others.

Our decisions will be based on a series of predictions and calculated expectations. In business, past results vie with external market forecasts to generate goals and objectives. I’ve been there and experienced the pressure of trying to achieve unrealistic budgets and targets for which there was little tangible basis!

It happens in other areas of life too.

...School teachers extrapolate SATs results to predict students’ future grades.

...Parents determine which school their children should attend from past exam records.

...KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) in the medical arena are determined from past performance, which may, or may

Arrogance/Pride	Lies/deceitfulness
Murder	Plotting evil schemes
Eagerness for wrong	False witnesses/testimony
Incitement designed to cause conflict	





not, be attainable in the future.

...In marriage and family life, assumptions are made about how relationships will pan out.

...We handle financial and health choices in a cavalier manner, often ignoring the potential outcome of our spending and eating habits.

Our decisions usually hinge on a host of variables frequently outside of our control – time, circumstances, those affected, the cost of alternative options, etc.

**Every choice we make involves consequences – after-effects.**

Bible scholars refer to this principle as,

*'The Law of Sowing and Reaping'* using Galatians 6:7 – ***"we reap what we sow"*** – as a reference point. There's a similar passage in 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 which is frequently used to encourage financial giving.

But this isn't just about money. We find this maxim throughout the Bible covering every aspect of life. Here are just four such references:

- One 'apparent friend' of Job said, ***"It's my observation that those who plough evil and sow trouble reap evil and trouble."***<sup>5</sup>
- Jeremiah 17:10 records God declaring, ***"I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve."***
- Jesus said, ***"Consider carefully what you hear ... with the measure you use, it will be measured to you – and even more."***<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Romans 6:23

<sup>3</sup> Galatians 5:1 (MSG)

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 6:24

<sup>5</sup> Job 4:8 (MSG)

<sup>6</sup> Mark 4:24

- One Beatitude from the Sermon on the Mount focusing on sowing and reaping, pronounces, ***"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."***<sup>7</sup>

We live in a 'tit for tat' world where people often 'give as good as they get' – usually negatively. Rarely, although there are some exceptions, do people give back when they've received something positive.

If we constantly criticise others, don't be surprised when criticism is reciprocated. When we 'sow' gossip, guess what? Others gossip about us. But when we smile at someone, or encourage others, the compliment is often returned. The list is endless – in both a positive and negative sense.

Sometimes a delay is experienced between giving and receiving – the same universal principle at work in sowing and reaping. Farmers don't plant seeds and expect a harvest immediately. If we wait patiently, just as the farmer does, we'll be rewarded.

Consider Jesus's declaration, ***"...with the measure you use, it will be measured to you"*** as we take another 'SELAH MOMENT' to ask:

### ➤ How do I measure up?

Many parents stand their children against a wall to record – albeit in a one-dimensional aspect – the steady progress of their children's growth and development.

In the last year:

- Have I become a 'bigger person' and grown spiritually?

- Am I less prone to criticise and judge than previously?

- Am I more willing to share my faith with others?

- What have I learned recently and begun to put into practice in my life?

- How does my spiritual development 'measure up'?

### ➤ What measures do I use with others?

- Do I expect people to treat me more favourably than I treat them?

- Do I demand higher standards from some people, as opposed to others, or even myself?

In another passage about measuring in Matthew 7:1-5, Jesus revealed it's easy to recognise other people's faults and issues and yet turn a 'blind eye' to ours. We see someone else's specks of dust and yet fail to remove 2x4 planks in our own eyes.

- Am I a giver rather than a taker?

Winston Churchill, *above*, once said, ***"We make a living by what we get but we make a life by what we give"***.

Consider Acts 20:35, ***"It is more blessed to give than to receive"***. Jesus didn't say we aren't blessed when we receive – but we're ***"more blessed"*** when we give. It's an important distinction. Receiving is great but giving is even better!

We should elevate people – encouraging, inspiring and motivating them (and ourselves) to go higher in every aspect of life. How do we measure up?

Please don't gloss over the above questions – take time to reflect before moving on to our next area.



<sup>7</sup> Matthew 5:7





## USING WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN US

Most of us will agree everyone is a unique combination of gifts, talents and abilities. Our personalities, experiences and qualifications – educational and vocational – help to define our exclusive blend of characteristics. There's no-one like us anywhere else on the planet. As a result, no-one else can be the same, or do the same, as us.

In Romans 12:6-8 (NLT) says,

*"In His grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy,*

*speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly."*

What impresses me here is not Paul's list of gifts (or the other ministries and spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 & 14 and Ephesians 4) but rather the encouragement to 'up our game' – *"speak out with as much faith..."; "serve well"; "teach well"; "give generously"; "take the*





*responsibility seriously”; “do it gladly”.*

There’s a more extensive review of spiritual gifts in **‘BITESIZE BELIEFS – DOUBLE JOINTED’** but here I’m emphasising Christianity isn’t a *‘spectator sport’*. We’re all in this together and each one of us can, and should, make a difference.

Some people have suggested that I’m a perfectionist. Obviously, they don’t know me very well – I’m increasingly aware of my faults and failings! I admit I get frustrated with myself when I don’t match up to my expectations – I aim to do the best I can and strive for excellence, even if I don’t manage to achieve it.

Before someone says striving isn’t Biblical, *‘strive’* is used four times in the New Testament and the phrase *‘make every effort’* (basically the same concept) appears on nine occasions – including four in 2 Peter.

And perfectionism is also Biblical. The Christian Growth Study Bible (NIV) records 2 Corinthians 13:11 as, ***“Aim for perfection”*** and Jesus told us, ***“But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.”***<sup>8</sup>

Why does this matter? I’d contend excellence needs to come as standard – a priority in our thinking and our actions. Our Heavenly Father gave the best He could for us – Jesus and the Holy Spirit. He deserves the best of our time, our skills and abilities, our energy and strength, our creativity and finest innovative thinking, to love, serve and care for others in sharing His Kingdom message.

When we willingly allow the Holy Spirit to energise us, He *‘supercharges’* our efforts and activities to achieve ***“immeasurably more than we can think or imagine.”***<sup>9</sup>

## OUTSIDE IN OR INSIDE OUT?

In Mark 7:15 and Matthew 15:11, Jesus says something His Disciples couldn’t comprehend when the religious rulers criticised Him for non-observance of pre-meal handwashing customs.

The ritual, designed to make a meal holy, was elaborate. A ceremonial two-handled cup was held by the left hand



and water poured three times over the right hand, up to minimum wrist level. Then, using a special clean towel, the cup was held in the right hand to pour water three times over the left hand whilst reciting a specific prayer of blessing, before drying both hands in the towel. Complicated – yep!

I’m positive Jesus knew germs and bacteria affect us physically, but His response to the criticism was figurative. He was more concerned about output than input.

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 5:48 (NLT)

<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 3:20

Answering the Disciples' question, Jesus provided an extensive list of attitudes and actions that *'pollute'* us. In Matthew 15:18-19 (NLT) He says:

***"But the words you speak come from the heart – that's what defiles you. For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander."***

Is this a potential *'which came first – chicken or egg'* scenario? From where do our attitudes and actions originate? What's the root cause? Is it *'outside in'* or *'inside out'* or maybe *'and both'*?

I believe Jesus is emphasising we always have choices over whatever influences vie for our attention.

Even if we're swayed by inappropriate stimuli, e.g. what we read, watch or are involved with, we decide whether we allow external pressures to find expression in our lives.

It's all about personal responsibility. We choose...we bear the consequences of those choices.

On the other side of the equation, the Apostle Paul helpfully provides a checklist to assist the decision-making process: ***"... whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things."***<sup>10</sup>

Paul's inventory of commendable attributes is the antidote to the list Jesus gave which has the potential to pollute our hearts. We're all affected by external influences, but they only find expression to the extent we allow them to invade

our thinking and attitudes.

It's time to ponder more questions in another **'SELAH MOMENT'**.

### ➤ What kind of fruit am I cultivating?

Most people don't want to be perceived as being overbearing, narcissistic or obnoxious, so where does that behaviour come from? What we expose ourselves to affects the way we live.

There's a truism that *'hurt people hurt people'*. Often what we've experienced impacts us and takes root within us to find expression in our actions. Are there any areas where we consciously allow negative influences in our lives?

### ➤ In the *'spare moments'* of life, where does my mind wander?

When we're in *'free thinking mode'*, e.g. driving the car, mowing the lawn or doing housework, our minds can flit around seemingly uncontrolled. What do we think about in those times?

Jesus talked about our treasure being ***"where our heart is."***<sup>11</sup>

Our minds invariably focus on the most important aspects of our lives – family or other relationships, career prospects and associated financial stability, or many other *'worthy'* aspirations. Do these thoughts *'consume'* us? How far are we prepared to go to achieve them?

Paul writing to the Philippians said he knew what it was to be, ***"in need ... and to have plenty."***<sup>12</sup> He knew how to be content in ***"any and every situation"*** and empathically declares, ***"I can do all this through him who gives me strength"***. How about us?

Here's another aspect that fits with the title, **'INSIDE JOB'**.

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<sup>10</sup> Philippians 4:8

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 6:21; Luke 12:34

<sup>12</sup> Philippians 4:12-13

...continued on page 18...











...those who **TRUST** in the  
**LORD** will find new **STRENGTH**.

*They will soar high  
on wings like eagles.*

They will **RUN** and not  
grow **WEARY**. They will  
**WALK** and not **FAINT**.

**ISAIAH 40:31**

## APPEARANCES MAY BE DECEPTIVE

Remember playing *'pass the parcel'* as a child? The excitement of a huge present neatly wrapped up in various layers of coloured or brown paper. Even though we knew the final layer would be much smaller than the original, we still hoped we'd be holding the parcel when the music stopped, and the prize would be wonderful.

But many of us become disillusioned when we realise, unlike pass parcel prizes, not everyone is as good on the inside as they appear to be on the outside. It's even more disappointing when people think we're like that!

Jesus didn't pull any punches when it came to religious leaders who He considered didn't match up inside and outside. In Matthew 23:27-28 He called them hypocrites and like whitewashed tombs, *"... beautiful on the outside but on the inside full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean... on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."*

The Message calls them *"total frauds"* – an unequivocal indictment.

God doesn't look at situations the same way we do and has an advantage on us. He told Samuel He sees the inside rather than outside appearances.<sup>13</sup>

Often there are *'hidden areas'* we don't want to reveal – but God perceives the core of who we really are.

Proverbs 20:27 (NLT) says, *"The Lord's light penetrates the human spirit, exposing every hidden motive."* Eventually, other people will *'see through'* us too.

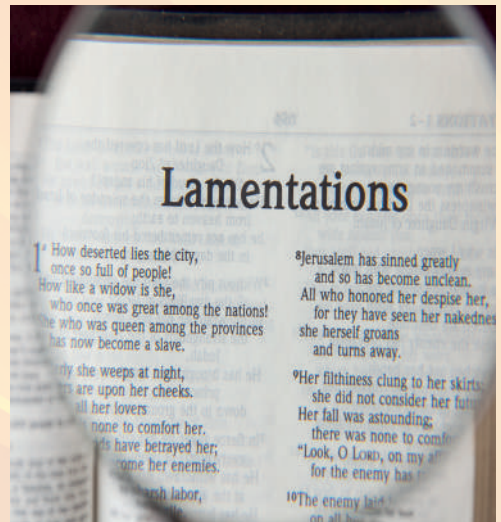
We could consider these verses either condemnatory or stimulating. *'Glass half*

*empty'* people think God is so far beyond them, there's no point in even trying to understand Him and His ways. *'Glass half full'* people say, *"I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength"*.<sup>14</sup>

This isn't mere *'positive thinking'*. It's about trusting our Heavenly Father Who wants us to know His purposes for our lives. By allowing the Holy Spirit to empower and help us, we become more like Jesus – inside and out.

## TESTING TIMES

Lamentations isn't one of my *'go-to'* books. It contains some wonderful verses but honestly, the title gives it away. Lamentations conjures up hopelessness and despair, coupled with mourning and weeping – not a pretty picture in my estimation.



<sup>13</sup> 1 Samuel 3:1

<sup>14</sup> Philippians 4:13 (NLT)

<sup>15</sup> Lamentations 3:1

<sup>16</sup> Lamentations 3:22-23

<sup>17</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:16

<sup>18</sup> Proverbs 18:24



Jeremiah depicts himself as, ***“a man who has seen affliction”***.<sup>15</sup> He doesn't appear to be a barrel of laughs or someone with whom to have a good time, the last person on a party guest list.

Jeremiah chapter 3 details a long list of physical, emotional, mental and circumstantial troubles he's endured. To cap it all he even feels God isn't listening to his prayers and he's become a person of public ridicule and mockery. And this man was God's representative to, and for, the people of Israel and yet he's a confirmed pessimist and fully paid-up melancholic.

Thankfully later in chapter 3, Jeremiah makes an attitudinal step change. In verse 21 he says, ***“Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope”*** before proclaiming one of the most encouraging statements in the Bible – ***“Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.”***<sup>16</sup>

I love verse 40, ***“Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord”***, or as The Message translates it, ***“Let's take a good look at the way we're living and reorder our lives under God.”***

Jeremiah initially felt hopeless, and undoubtedly, life's circumstances can get us down. How we respond is determined by where we look and how we think.

If we ever feel the world is against us, that we're facing *'Everest-scale Mountain problems'*, the Apostle Paul comes to our rescue with the encouragement to keep going. ***“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”***<sup>17</sup>

Notice: renewal is a daily activity.

Here's another **'SELAH MOMENT'** to reflect how we approach setbacks and ask ourselves:

➤ **What kinds of situations 'knock me back'?**

Many scenarios may be difficult to handle – personal criticism; apparent failure; other people's success (possibly at our expense). Be honest and face up to any area that's problematic and *'name and shame'* them!



➤ **How do I handle myself in those instances?**

Do I bottle them up, try and bury them, or face them and the consequences head on? Sharing with a sympathetic and supportive confidante may help. Remember, ***“there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother”***<sup>18</sup> – His name is Jesus! We can come to Him through prayer at any time. It's the best way to deal with difficult situations!

Ever heard the phrase *'it's all in the mind'*? The way we think undoubtedly

affects our lives. Sometimes I ‘rehearse’ issues in my head. However, from experience I know this kind of ‘self-talk’ isn’t always beneficial – it easily becomes negative or critical if I perceive someone has wronged me. “Prayer is a much better alternative because it takes the focus off my issues leading to a place where the Holy Spirit can ‘speak into my life’.

That brings us neatly to the next area for consideration.

## VIEWING POINTS

Rosalyn and I love the English Lake District with its dramatic mountain vistas overlooking the splendid North Wales coastline. For our 30th Wedding Anniversary though, we travelled through The Canadian Rockies, which put our National Parks somewhat in

the shade. The scenery was superb – mountain grandeur at its finest with tumbling rivers, huge waterfalls and sky-reflecting blue lakes. I was in photographic heaven.

Psalm 121:1-2 poses a poignant rhetorical question, “***...where does my help come from?***” Even with the splendour of the mountains around him, the writer’s answer is, “***...my help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth***”.

How often do we look in the wrong places for answers?

It’s appropriate to have close friends and companions with whom we can share – especially in tough times. But when we rely too much on other people, we’re in danger of disappointment if they fail to live up to expectations or possibly tell us home truths we’d rather not hear.





It's also easy to put our faith in popular opinion and the perceived wisdom of the age's culture, rather than focus attention on the One who holds everything in His hands.

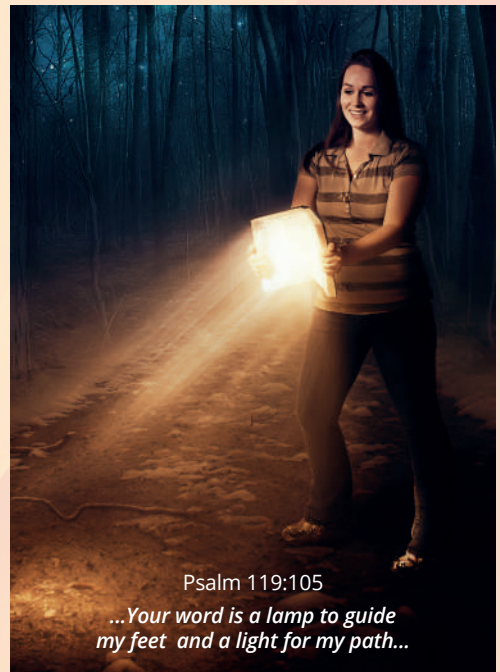
Colossians 3:2 says, ***"Set your mind on the things that are above, not on earthly things"***. The Message Version frames it, ***"Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ – that's where the action is. See things from his perspective."***

It's an amazing privilege to see things from God's viewpoint. Physically we're grounded here on earth, but spiritually we can soar on eagle's wings to the heavens. When we put our hope in the Lord our strength will be renewed.<sup>19</sup>

Let's not focus on what's happening in front of our noses – the difficult situations – but see the bigger picture and the potential solutions our Heavenly Father has waiting for us.

The Holy Spirit is our Guide and Counsellor and He illuminates our path when we use the Bible as our guide – He inspired the Bible after all. Psalm 119:105 (NLT) says ***"Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path"***. Many of us are content to drive around in spiritual darkness rather than use the Holy Spirit's gloom-dispelling fog lights to illuminate the road ahead.

We need to *'step up to the plate'*, instead of *'keeping our head down'*, by avoiding trouble or not volunteering. Using divine strategies, it's possible to overcome



Psalm 119:105

***...Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path...***

issues we as a nation, and the nations of the world, should be tackling.

Community transformation occurs when God's Word – written and prophetic – is applied to real-life scenarios. We're not the world's moral conscience or judge and jury on all that displeases God in our culture – that's His job. Jesus said He hadn't come to condemn the world,<sup>20</sup> so it's not our prerogative!

Our fractured world may be morally bankrupt but can be redeemed and restored through Jesus. Our mandate is to live Christ-centred, Holy Spirit empowered lives amid the chaos around us. Jesus said our love for one another will draw people to know Him<sup>21</sup>. We're to love, bless and pray for those who hurt or offend us<sup>22</sup> – not castigate and criticise them. It may not be easy, but who said being a Christian would be undemanding?

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<sup>19</sup> Isaiah 40:31

<sup>20</sup> John 3:17

<sup>21</sup> John 13:35

<sup>22</sup> Luke 6:27ff



'We cannot teach people anything; we can only help them discover it within themselves.'

**GALILEO GALILEI**



## PUTTING THE LEARNING INTO PRACTICE

I love spending time thinking through concepts, but I'm always asking myself "so what?" questions.

- So what will people learn from this knowledge I'm sharing?
- So what will be the difference in their lives?
- So what am I personally learning – what impact will it have on me?

I'm often reminded of a quotation attributed to Galileo Galilei, the Italian Renaissance astronomer, physicist, engineer, philosopher, and mathematician, who said, *'We cannot teach people anything; we can only help them discover it within themselves.'*

I'm acutely aware of the difference between teaching and learning and the even greater difference between belief and application.

James 1:22-25 (NLT) says:

*"But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it."*

There are three implications if we fail to implement God's Word:

- **We're fooling ourselves:** other translations say, *"we deceive ourselves"*.
- **We forget:** many of us have 'selective spiritual amnesia' about putting into

practice what we've been taught.

➤ **We forgo God's blessing:** living in the centre of God's will requires application.

We must transfer from learning the truth to living the truth. The value of what we learn is only measured by what occurs afterwards.

It's time to be brutally honest with ourselves.

Many of us *'talk ourselves out'* of God's best for us. How? By saying:

- "I can't do (fill in the blank) – I'm not good enough"
- "I don't have the faith to believe God could use me"
- "Someone else would be better than me"
- "I'm not in a good place right now"
- "I don't really feel led to serve in that way"

We may justify and defend this mindset, but each objection needs addressing.

➤ **"I can't – I'm not good enough..."**

This could be legitimate in some circumstances, e.g. when we don't have the requisite skills. But often we put ourselves down due to fear of perceived potential failure or previous experience. Or is inverted pride involved?

➤ **"I don't have the faith..."**

Firstly, remember we're all equipped to serve in God's Kingdom. Ephesians 4:11-13 tells us one role of church leaders is to equip us *"for works of service"* so enabling us to *"become mature"*.

Secondly, Jesus said we only need mustard grain sized faith to move mountains<sup>23</sup> – how much faith is required in the situation?

➤ **"Someone else would be better..."**

Comparison is a spiritual assassin. We don't need to emulate or rival others – just be ourselves. The Bible says, *"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do"*.<sup>24</sup> We're not supposed to be carbon copies of anyone else. We reflect the fulness of Christ collectively – let's stop competing with others and be the masterpieces God created us to be.

➤ **"I'm not in a good place..."**

Two questions: what's the root cause and what can be done about it? If sin is the issue – deal with it. We always have access to the Father – He's ready to forgive and *"cleanse us from all unrighteousness"*.<sup>25</sup>

If it's because someone has hurt us, let us down, unjustly criticised us, etc., make every effort to resolve the issue.<sup>26</sup>

➤ **"I don't feel led..."**

This is 'Christian-ese' for *"I don't feel like doing that – not now; not ever. I'm not going to pray about it because you're probably right and I'll end up doing something I don't want to do!"*

A much better alternative is, *"I've prayed about this but believe there is another role in which I could serve God more effectively"*.

Sadly, many people suffer from a

common disease known as 'IRS' – no, not the US Tax Department – 'Involvement Reluctance Syndrome'. But if we are to be a whole and healthy *"body of Christ"*, we're all indispensable.<sup>27</sup>

It's an appropriate moment for another 'SELAH MOMENT'. Here are a few pertinent questions about implementing change into our lives.

● **What's our first response to something new?**

When asked to participate in a different or new role how do we react? Is there a genuine desire to assist or an initial desire to find a way out?

● **How do we handle situations when we know the Holy Spirit is convicting us?**

When 'butterflies in the stomach' sensations occur, it usually implies change is necessary. But what happens next? Is it *fright, fight or flee*?

● **How open or closed is my mind?**

The answer will probably indicate our willingness to grow spiritually and become more mature in our faith. Over the years, I've become less 'black and white' and put aside many preconceptions by approaching issues more empathetically.

In the final analysis, God knows us better than we know ourselves and what we're capable of – both with and without His Holy Spirit working in us. He's not fazed by our reluctance, or the obstacles we erect to extract ourselves from situations we'd rather not face. He's not daunted by our perceived inadequacies or previous failures. He's willing to entrust us with the Great Commission to accomplish His earthly purposes.

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<sup>24</sup> Ephesians 2:8-10

<sup>25</sup> 1 John 1:9

<sup>26</sup> "BITESIZE BELIEFS – BEAUTIFUL BODY" looks at relational breakdown in greater detail

<sup>27</sup> See 1 Corinthians 12 especially verse 27



"Selah"



## NEW BEGINNINGS

Earlier we noted Ephesians 3:20 says God can do more than we can ask for or imagine – the culmination of the Apostle Paul's wonderful prayer. Take a moment to read Ephesians 3:16-21, and check out the following:

- The Holy Spirit works in us and strengthens us with His power.
- Jesus Himself lives in our hearts by faith.
- If our foundations are grounded in love and power, we'll know the infinite dimensions of Jesus' love.
- We can be filled completely with the fullness of God.

Is this merely the Apostle's over-ambitious wishful thinking for the fledgling Ephesian church? Are his aspirations for them unrealistic? Is he serious its possible? Does it apply to us today?

I'm convinced it is applicable to us. Even though I regularly limit the Holy Spirit by my lack of faith and inability to trust Him completely, on occasions I've known the power to which Paul is referring.

There are numerous examples throughout the Bible, evidencing the exploits of ordinary, imperfect people who were used to effect the transformation of communities and indeed nations.

- Abraham lied selfishly on two occasions denying Sarah was his wife, yet he's described as the *'father of faith'*.<sup>28</sup>
- Dreamer and vision-interpreter Joseph was betrayed, falsely accused and imprisoned, yet rose to become Egypt's Prime Minister to save Israel from famine.

- Stuttering Moses needed his brother Aaron to speak on his behalf.

Then there's the hesitant and unwilling Gideon, reluctant Deborah the warrior judge, Ruth, the faithful foreign widow, David, the shepherd boy who becomes King and Daniel and Esther who influenced kings.

In the New Testament we read:

- Impetuous Peter often acted and spoke inappropriately.
- Brothers James & John nicknamed *"sons of thunder"*,<sup>29</sup> presumably because they argued vehemently.
- Thomas was racked with doubts and insecurities.
- Saul, the ideologically religious zealot, is transformed as Paul, the enthusiastic missionary evangelist.
- John Mark defected causing relational breakdown between Paul and his mentor Barnabas yet is subsequently restored to become Paul's trusted companion.

The Bible doesn't pull any punches about human weaknesses and failings yet always declares there's forgiveness and hope for the future when we submit ourselves to Kingdom plans.

As *"new creations"*,<sup>30</sup> it's time for us to believe for a little more from, and for, ourselves. We have a new start through grace – our former way of life has ended. We don't become perfect overnight – it's a process – but Colossians 3:10 says we, *"... have put on the new self, which is*

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<sup>28</sup> Romans 4:16

<sup>29</sup> Mark 3:17

<sup>30</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17



*being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”*

As we submit to the Holy Spirit, we become catalysts for change.

ATTITUDE ALIGNED

I don’t know much about aviation. When I get on an aeroplane, I want to arrive at my destination safely and get off promptly.

Obviously when flying, altitude is vital, but on take-off and landing, pilots are as concerned with attitude – the plane’s horizontal level – as vertical height. If a plane’s horizontal axis isn’t parallel, drift is created resulting in difficulty maintaining direction.

And the same is true of us. We need to make sure we are ‘attitude aligned’, otherwise we’ll veer off course.

Scripturally, there’s another dimension to the word ‘mind’. It’s not so much about our thought-life but more about



our attitudes and how our lives are changed due to the new life we have. Philippians 3:20 declares “*our citizenship is in heaven*” – we’re residents of a new Kingdom and should align ourselves to our new Ruler.

Here’s our penultimate ‘**SELAH MOMENT**’. Consider the implications of the following New Testament verses. Ask if there are any aspects where ‘attitude alignment’ is required.

<i>“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”</i>	Mark 12:30
<i>“Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit.”</i>	Romans 8:5 (NLT)
<i>“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.”</i>	Romans 12:2
<i>“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”</i>	Philippians 4:7
<i>“...throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God – truly righteous and holy.”</i>	Ephesians 4:22-24
<i>“So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world.”</i>	1 Peter 1:13 (NLT)

I included the Great Commandment from Mark 12:30 because loving God results in love for others – it's how the Kingdom increases.

The Old Testament prophet Micah<sup>31</sup> pinpoints three simple yet distinct directives:

- Act justly
- Love mercy
- Walk humbly

The Message Version puts it this way:

*"But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbour, be compassionate and loyal in your love, and don't take yourself too seriously – take God seriously."*

The first stanza of Psalm 89:14 (NLT) declares, ***"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne"*** – two pillars of God's character we're required to emulate.<sup>18</sup>

Only a combination of earthly social justice and an eternal, heavenly



perspective will conquer global and national battles.

We can't earn salvation – it's a ***"free gift"***<sup>32</sup> – but we can ***"work out"***<sup>33</sup> our salvation, led and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

## CRUNCH TIME

We're virtually at the end with one final ***'SELAH MOMENT'*** to navigate before finishing.

***"Pause and calmly"*** ask:

➤ **How committed am I?**

Does fear of the cost involved, previous experiences, other people's reactions, prevent me from *'going all out for God'*?

➤ **How decisive am I?**

Where am I on the continuum of making quick decisions without counting the cost, and prevarication finding it almost impossible to choose?

➤ **How often do I seek God's will?**

***"Pray continually"***<sup>34</sup> is *'an attitude of the mind'* instruction – let's be consciously aware of the Holy Spirit's promptings, each moment, and not resist Him.

Let's choose to live with a renewed sense of purpose and power as the Holy Spirit reveals our true destiny as God's redeemed children.

Our ***"INSIDE JOB"*** attitudes and aspirations, plus our willingness to submit to God's vision and plans for our lives, will determine the outcome.

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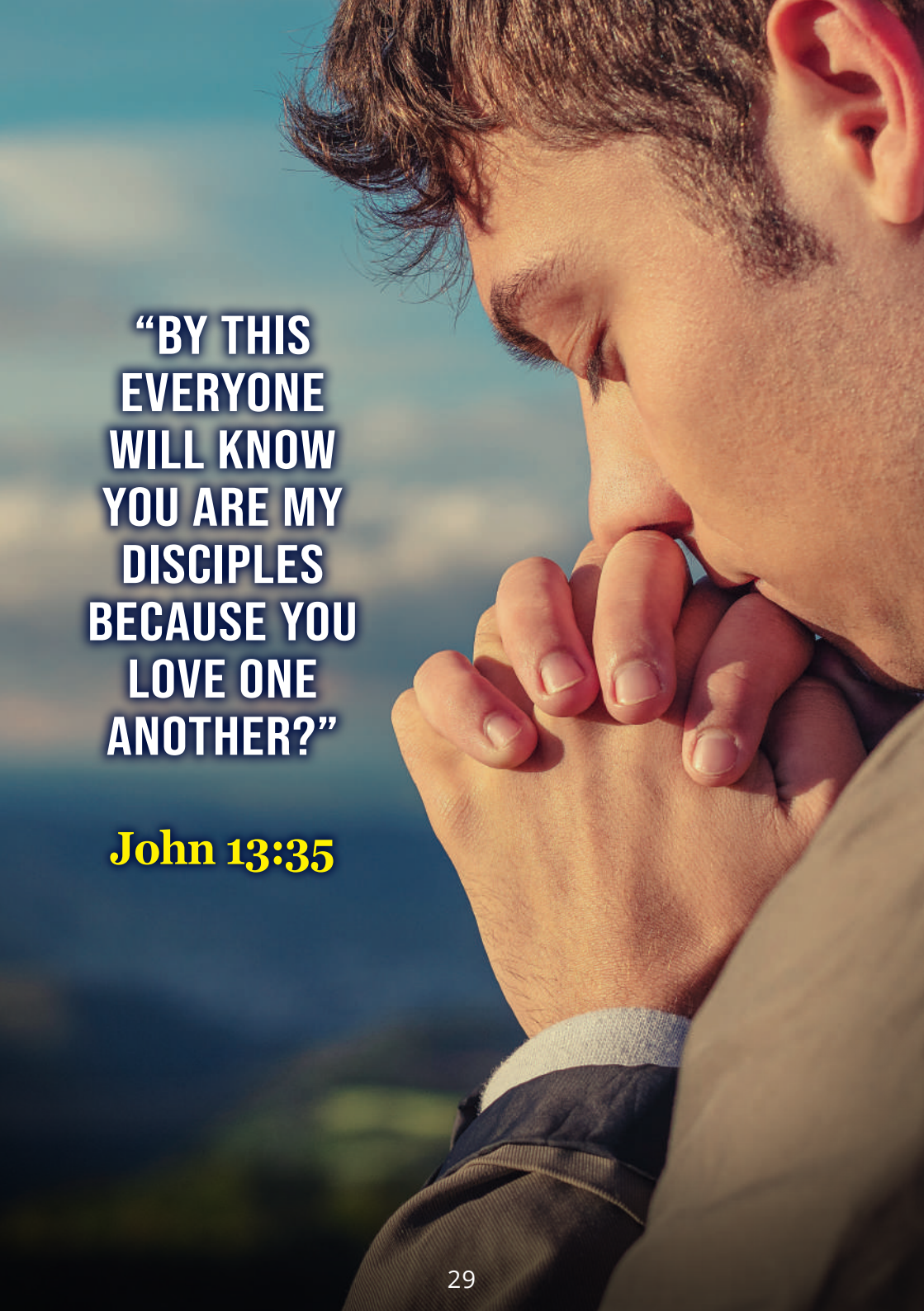
<sup>31</sup> Micah 6:8

<sup>32</sup> Romans 6:23 (NLT)

<sup>33</sup> Philippians 2:12

<sup>34</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:17

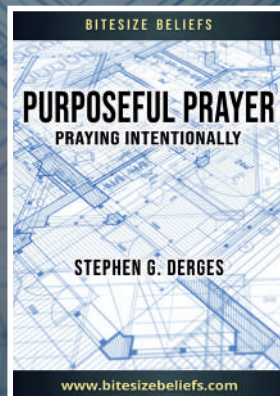
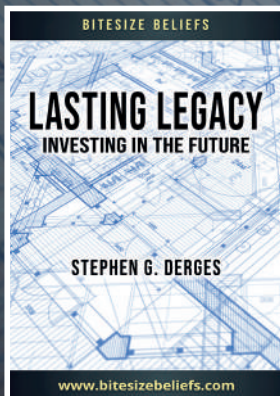
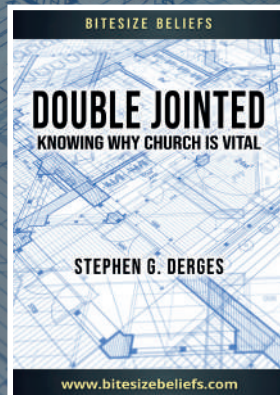
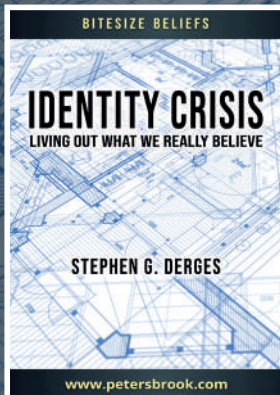
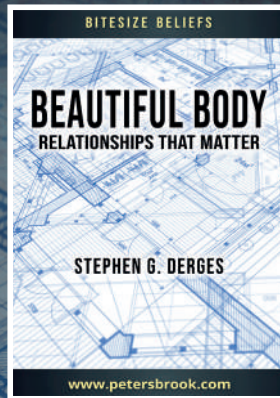
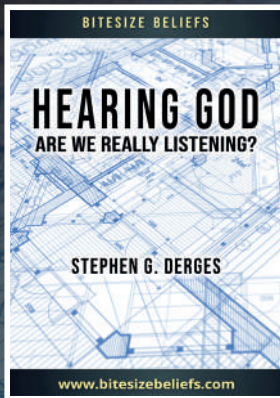




**“BY THIS  
EVERYONE  
WILL KNOW  
YOU ARE MY  
DISCIPLES  
BECAUSE YOU  
LOVE ONE  
ANOTHER?”**

**John 13:35**

# OTHER **BITESIZE BELIEFS** TITLES



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## DISCOVER



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**BELIEVINGTOGETHER**

Every day we make choices affecting us and the people around us. How and why we determine those decisions has both implications and consequences.

What measures do we use when it comes to assessing ourselves or other people? How can we act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God? What does it mean to 'see' from heaven's perspective?

This short book examines how we can align our attitudes to God's Kingdom purposes and what it means to achieve our God-given potential. It also considers the interaction between our attitudes, beliefs and thought processes and where accountability for our behaviour begins and ends, especially when we're under pressure or facing turbulent times.

Beginning today, each of us can make positive choices that benefit ourselves and those around us.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR...

Stephen Derges was previously Pastor of a Baptist Church and now a Trustee focused on leading an Independent Evangelical church in Devon.

He writes for various publications and websites, speaks at churches and conferences and has broadcast on local radio and television on faith and business leadership. Both he and his wife are certified Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® practitioners.

More information at: [www.bitesizebeliefs.com](http://www.bitesizebeliefs.com)



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