

2 CORINTHIANS

awA ward

*Leaning into the
Uncomfortable
with Grace*

STUDY GUIDE | PART 3



TABLE OF CONTENTS

3 INTRODUCTION: AWKWARD Part 3

Understanding 2 Corinthians 10-13

7 Week 13 | 2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-18

Sermon Notes + Reading Plan + Group Questions

15 Week 14 | 2 CORINTHIANS 11:1-33

Sermon Notes + Reading Plan + Group Questions

23 Week 15 | 2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-10

Sermon Notes + Reading Plan + Group Questions

Prayer Experience: A Prayer for Boasting in, Not Bemoaning Our Weakness

Prayer Experience: Contentment

33 Week 16 | 2 CORINTHIANS 12:11-13:

Sermon Notes + Reading Plan + Group Questions

THIS STUDY GUIDE BELONGS TO:

PLEASE ONLY ONE GUIDE PER PERSON.

awkward

*Leaning into the
Uncomfortable
with Grace*

If you want to protect your ears, experts recommend avoiding loud activities, wearing proper protection, keeping the volume level low on TVs, car stereos, and your AirPods, and taking periodic breaks from loud noises. The problem is these steps only protect you from the volume. As we all know too well, it's the content of what is communicated that often can hurt far more and is much more difficult to avoid. There are so many phrases that you do not want to hear:

The significant other who says, "We need to talk."

The teacher holding your final, saying, "You didn't really study, did you?"

The nurse who calls to tell you, "The doctor would like to speak with you about your test results."

There are also other words we don't like hearing, specifically anything that calls into question the trajectory or values of our lives. We don't like confrontation. We don't want to be challenged. Wouldn't it be easier if we all let each other do what we want?

As we near the end of 2 Corinthians, Paul's tone and focus shifts. He is the one who has to bring the words that Corinth doesn't want to hear. Some of them have been listening to the wrong people; they have been getting carried away to a false gospel; they've been valuing strength and eloquence over truth. And so, Paul must be stern, Paul must be bold, if they are going to be saved from this path of destruction.

And so, he says, "We'll destroy the ideas that keep you from Christ" (10:5-6)

He writes, "You're being deceived" (11:3).

And he instructs, "Examine yourselves, to see if you're in the faith." (13:5)

Paul is willing to say the hard words, because he deeply loves and wants to see them listen, turn, and be restored. For he also says from his heart, "Your restoration is what we pray for." (13:9b).

If you want to protect your ears, cover them up. But if you want to protect your soul, lean-in, open your ears, and listen to what Paul has to say—even if it's **awkward**, uncomfortable, or painful. He's ready to redirect the Corinthians and us back to the values, goodness, and truth of Jesus Christ.

Grace & Peace,

Derick Zeulner

Associate Pastor

South Shores Church

dzeulner@southshores.org

Understanding 2 Corinthians 10-13

The Relationship of Chapters 10-13 to the Rest of 2 Corinthians¹

To this point in the letter, Paul has defended his frank criticism in his severe letter to the Corinthians (2:14–7:3) and exulted over their demonstration of loyalty to him during Titus’s visit (7:4–16). His report of their desire to make amends encouraged Paul to press them to complete their collection and to give generously (8:1–9:15).

But in chaps. 10–13 Paul unexpectedly switches from a conciliatory posture to a combatant one. He indicts the Corinthians for an assortment of vices that he fears they still engage in (12:20–21) and warns that he may have to be severe with them when he next visits them (13:10). He chastises them for being hoodwinked by a different gospel and a different Jesus and being led astray from a pure devotion to Christ (11:2–4). He chides them for thinking that they are wise while putting up with fools (11:19). Paul devotes most of his attention, however, to defending himself against unnamed detractors; and he attacks boastful interferers as fools and worse, as false apostles, deceitful workers, and ministers of Satan masquerading as ministers of God (11:13–15).

Since Paul accuses his opponents of “illegitimacy and ignorant pretentiousness” (10:2, 7, 12, 15; 11:5, 13–15; 12:11), many assume that these same charges have been leveled against him. In these chapters he launches a counterattack that turns the charges back on his accusers. He pulls out all stops in trying to rally the Corinthians to his point of view and to reject these false teachers who have beguiled and badgered them.

Outline of Chapters 10-13²

Paul’s Appeal to the Rebellious Minority in Corinth (2 Cor. 10:1–13:10)

1. Paul’s defense of his humility as an apostle (2 Cor. 10:1–11)
2. Paul’s defense of his authority as an apostle (2 Cor. 10:12–18)
3. Paul’s defense of his boasting like a fool (2 Cor. 11:1–21a)
4. Paul’s boast in his service and suffering (2 Cor. 11:21b–33)
5. Paul’s boast in his heavenly vision and subsequent weakness (2 Cor. 12:1–13)
6. Paul’s final defense and appeal to the rebellious (2 Cor. 12:14–13:10)

Closing Greetings (2 Cor. 13:11–14)

¹ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 417–418.

² Taken from the ESV® Study Bible (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®), copyright ©2008 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

10-13 PAUL'S FINAL CHALLENGE

10-12

A MAIN SOURCE OF THE CONFLICT



BUT NONE OF THIS MATTERS! INSTEAD, I WILL BRAG ABOUT MY WEAKNESS.

(11:30)



PAUL

THE SUPER-APOSTLES
(11:5, 12:11)

- ✓ JEWISH BIBLE EXPERTS
- ✓ KNOWLEDGE ABOUT JESUS
- ✓ ASKED FOR LOTS OF MONEY

- ✓ A PHARISEE (MEMORIZED THE WHOLE BIBLE!)
- ✓ SPENT TIME WITH THE RISEN JESUS
- ✓ HAD VISIONS OF JESUS' HEAVENLY THRONE ROOM
- ✓ GIVEN HIS ENTIRE LIFE TO THE MISSION OF JESUS
- ✓ NEVER ASKED FOR MONEY

"PAUL, MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU, FOR MY POWER IS MADE PERFECT THROUGH WEAKNESS."

(12:9)



13

A SOBER WARNING



SERIOUSLY! YOU NEED TO CHECK YOURSELVES. (13:5)



created by Bible Project



Scan to watch the Bible Project overview video on 2 Corinthians.

We are fully empowered to address every argument used to rationalize sin and to justify unbelief and to delay repentance.

— Sam Storms
SamStorms.org



Scan to read the blog post:
"Taking every Thought Captive for Christ"

aw/ward



Week 13

2 Corinthians 10:1-18

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

— 2 Corinthians 10:4-5

SERMON NOTES

WEEK 13 | June 30, 2024

BIG IDEA

NOTES

RESPONSE

S Soak

Read the passage slowly **asking the Holy Spirit to open it to you**. What from its surroundings or style is important?

O Observe

Take note of what is there. What is going on? **What seems significant?** Do you have any questions you'd like to ask the author?

M Meaning

Think through **why this is in the Bible**. What is the author trying to say? What is the main point of the passage? How does God work and where is His grace?

A Apply

The **goal is transformation**. How will the meaning of this passage transform your head (knowledge/beliefs), heart (desires/attitudes), and hands (actions/habits)?

southshores.org/soma

Day 1

2 Corinthians 10:1-6

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Finish your time in prayer.

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Finish your time in prayer.

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Finish your time in prayer.

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Finish your time in prayer.

S**O****M****A**

Finish your time in prayer.

Group Discussion

WEEK 13

INTRO DISCUSSION

Do you ever come across different in texts or emails than you do in person? Why do you think that is?

How can we best fight against false ideas of God?

OPEN SHARING (use these questions to look back at your O, M & As of your devotions)

How did God get your attention this week in your devotional reading?

Was there any specific way you wanted to apply your reading into your life?

FINAL QUESTIONS

How has Paul been mischaracterized? Why does this matter?

Why is Paul bold in his letters? What is he fighting against?

What are Paul's weapons in this fight? What is the goal?

God assigned Paul to Corinth as the ministry where God wants to work through him. What is/are your area(s) of ministry? How does God want to work through you?

PRAYER

God in Heaven, sometimes ministry doesn't look like how we want it. Sometimes people may misunderstand our motives or actions. Help us Lord to stay committed to the humility and gentleness of Christ—showing boldness over the gospel, but not over our pride. Help us remember that our war is spiritual and that our goal is obedience to Christ. Let us fight against the ideas and teachings that get in the way. Let us live and minister in a way that is true to our calling and is commended by the Lord. Amen.

Notes/Prayers

WEEK 13

QUICK NOTES

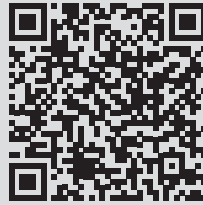
Paul's "Opponents"

In 2 Corinthians Paul's opponents appear to have infiltrated the church from the outside (2 Cor. 11:4). They had a background in Judaism (2 Cor. 11:22), but they also were influenced by the Hellenistic world. In these opponents Paul confronted a Hellenistic Jewish movement that opposed him but was not as concerned with circumcision and the Mosaic law as the Galatians had been. The views of these new opponents on power, prestige, and position reflected values adopted from the Hellenistic world. Particularly, they seem to have emphasized Hellenistic views of speaking and communicating, for they suggested that Paul's clear emphasis on the gospel was unimpressive and insignificant (2 Cor. 10:10; 11:6).

Thomas D. Lea and David Alan Black, *The New Testament: Its Background and Message*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 407.

Paul wasn't reacting merely out of hurt feelings (though doubtless his feelings were hurt), but out of the passionate perception that the gospel itself was at stake—and with it the eternal well-being of the Corinthians.

— D.A. Carson
theGospelCoalition.org



Scan to read the article: “Authority, Self-Defense & Christian Leadership”

awAward



Week 14

2 Corinthians 11:1-33

*If I must boast, I will boast of the things that
show my weakness.*

— 2 Corinthians 11:30

SERMON NOTES

WEEK 14 | July 7, 2024

BIG IDEA

NOTES

RESPONSE

S Soak

Read the passage slowly **asking the Holy Spirit to open it to you**. What from its surroundings or style is important?

O Observe

Take note of what is there. What is going on? **What seems significant?** Do you have any questions you'd like to ask the author?

M Meaning

Think through **why this is in the Bible**. What is the author trying to say? What is the main point of the passage? How does God work and where is His grace?

A Apply

The **goal is transformation**. How will the meaning of this passage transform your head (knowledge/beliefs), heart (desires/attitudes), and hands (actions/habits)?

southshores.org/soma

Day 1

2 Corinthians 11:1-4

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Finish your time in prayer.

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Finish your time in prayer.

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Finish your time in prayer.

S**O****M****A**

Finish your time in prayer.

S**O****M****A**

Finish your time in prayer.

Group Discussion

WEEK 14

INTRO DISCUSSION

Have you ever undergone extensive personal attacks?

What was the process like to clear your name?

OPEN SHARING (use these questions to look back at your O, M & As of your devotions)

How did God get your attention this week in your devotional reading?

Was there any specific way you wanted to apply your reading into your life?

FINAL QUESTIONS

What did these “super apostles” value? What did they attack about Paul?

What was Paul’s concern?

Paul doesn’t like talking about his qualifications. But what does his “foolish” talk tell us about what is actually important?

What do you boast in? Does it line up more with Paul or the “super apostles”?

PRAYER

Almighty God, guide us into a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. Help us distinguish between truth and lies, servants of Christ and servants of Satan. Strengthen our discernment and direct our values. May we become like Paul in valuing your righteousness and the work of the Kingdom over and above what makes us look good or gains us advantages in this life. Help us live for the eternal. Amen.

Notes/Prayers

WEEK 14

QUICK NOTES

Paul's Other Travels

On a number of occasions Paul lists some of the hardships he has endured, and often these refer to his experiences while traveling. For example, in 2 Corinthians 11:25b–27 he says:

Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, ... in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. (NRSV; see also 1 Cor 4:11; 2 Cor 6:4–5)

Since many of these experiences are unknown to us, these passages serve to remind us of how many gaps there are in our knowledge of Paul's life.

P. Trebilco, "Itineraries, Travel Plans, Journeys, Apostolic Parousia," ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity

I've learned that although it may not feel like it in the moment, he will be faithful to equip us with what we need each and every moment — even if it's simply enough energy to take our next breath.

— Sarah Walton
desiringGod.org



Scan to read the blog post: "Weakness Is an Invitation from God"

aw/ward



Week 15

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

— 2 Corinthians 12:9

SERMON NOTES

WEEK 15 | July 14, 2024

BIG IDEA

NOTES

RESPONSE

S Soak

Read the passage slowly **asking the Holy Spirit to open it to you**. What from its surroundings or style is important?

O Observe

Take note of what is there. What is going on? **What seems significant?** Do you have any questions you'd like to ask the author?

M Meaning

Think through **why this is in the Bible**. What is the author trying to say? What is the main point of the passage? How does God work and where is His grace?

A Apply

The **goal is transformation**. How will the meaning of this passage transform your head (knowledge/beliefs), heart (desires/attitudes), and hands (actions/habits)?

southshores.org/soma

Day 1

2 Corinthians 12:1-4

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Finish your time in prayer.

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Finish your time in prayer.

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Finish your time in prayer.

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Finish your time in prayer.

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Finish your time in prayer.

Group Discussion

WEEK 15

INTRO DISCUSSION

Discuss the following quote:

“The Christian thinks his weaknesses are his greatest hindrance in the life and service of God; God tells us that it is the secret of strength and success.”

— Andrew Murray, *Abide in Christ: The Joy of Being in God’s Presence*

What are other reasons we are resistant to weakness?

OPEN SHARING (use these questions to look back at your O, M & As of your devotions)

How did God get your attention this week in your devotional reading?

Was there any specific way you wanted to apply your reading into your life?

FINAL QUESTIONS

Why is Paul awkward about sharing his vision experience?

Why was Paul given a “thorn” and how did he respond to it?

How does God’s answer to Paul’s prayer (vs 9) provide a new way to understand your weaknesses, limitations, and problems?

Do you have a “thorn”? How has God used it?

How can you better use your weakness(es) to promote God’s power?

PRAYER

Gracious and Loving Father, who gives good gifts—even the ones that we would never ask for. Thank you for my weakness. Help me to see each weakness as a way for the power of Christ to rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, increase my ability to be content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. May they become the secret of strength and success in my service to You. Amen.

Notes/Prayers

WEEK 15

QUICK NOTES

Weakness

In Pauline literature, the term *astheneia* (“weakness”) plays a distinctive role. Anthropologically, weakness presupposes that a person’s whole being is dependent upon God and is subject to the limitations of all creation (1 Cor 2:3). Weakness also involves the inability of human beings to attain God’s favor by themselves (1 Cor 9:22).

Christologically, weakness becomes a badge of honor for the believer “in Christ” and the platform from which the power of God is exhibited in the world. For Paul, human weakness provides the best channel for divine power. The greatest revelation of this occurred in the person and work of Jesus Christ in the midst of his earthly and human existence (1 Cor 1:25–2:6). Paul has become like Christ in that the power of Christ has been revealed in Paul’s own weakness (2 Cor 10–13). Paul’s concept of weakness is, in sum, markedly theocentric. God depends neither on human strength nor on human achievements, not even in the church. Instead, he seeks out the weak, the ungodly and the hostile to redeem them and to fit them as vessels of his own strength. Weakness is—as the Lord himself had expressed it to Paul—the place where God’s power is perfected (2 Cor 12:9).

David Alan Black, “Weakness,” ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 966.

Prayer Experience: A Prayer for Boasting in, Not Bemoaning Our Weakness

Prayer by Scotty Smith, theGospelCoalition.org

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

— 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

Heavenly Father, as I meditate on these words of Paul, I vacillate between feelings of anger and relief. For as a young follower of Jesus, I wasn't taught to delight in weakness but rather to despise weakness, to deny weakness, to demonize weakness, to dethrone weakness. That's why I totally understand Martin Luther's statement that “bad theology is the worst taskmaster of all.” For I've suffered much under the merciless whip of several gospel distortions.

It was all about “the victorious Christian life”—overcoming and not underachieving; having a type A spiritual personality on steroids; being more than a conqueror, and never less than a hero. I didn't think in terms of sufficient grace, I wanted replacement grace—getting rid of anything unpleasant in my life.

Thank you, Father, for rescuing me from this and other misrepresentations of life in Christ. Thank you for the godly men and women you've brought into my life over the years—the humble and courageous servants of Jesus who've helped me understand the riches of the gospel and the way of the cross. Increase their tribe, Lord, increase their tribe.

Father, I know I'm not to be defined by my weakness and brokenness, but I realize more than ever, that's where Jesus meets me. I have zero ability to change my heart; I'm utterly dependent on you, the God who raises the dead. Fortunately, I'm out of boot straps to pull up. I very much want your power to rest on me; I very much need for your power to rest on me. Indeed, I'm desperate for all the sufficient grace you'll give me.

As you continue to humble and gentle my heart, greatly increase my compassion towards others in their weakness and brokenness. Forgive my irritation, impatience, and avoidance of people whose need is much greater than my supply.

What a wonderful, merciful Savior you are, Lord Jesus. Only because you embraced the weakness of the cross I now boast in the weaknesses of my life. What a most profound, liberating, and hope-filled paradox. Your power is made perfect in my weakness. So very Amen I pray with gratitude, in your holy and loving name.

Scotty Smith is the founding pastor of Christ Community Church in Franklin, Tennessee.

Scan to read Scotty's prayer in its original form.



Prayer Experience: Contentment

Prayer from *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions*

HEAVENLY FATHER,

If I should suffer need, and go unclothed, and be in poverty,
make my heart prize thy love, know it, be constrained by it,
though I be denied all blessings.

It is thy mercy to afflict and try me with wants,
for by these trials I see my sins,
and desire severance from them.

Let me willingly accept misery, sorrows, temptations,
if I can thereby feel sin as the greatest evil,
and be delivered from it with gratitude to thee,
acknowledging this as the highest testimony of thy love.

When thy Son, Jesus, came into my soul instead of sin,
he became more dear to me than sin had formerly been;
his kindly rule replaced sin's tyranny.

Teach me to believe that if ever I would have any sin subdued
I must not only labour to overcome it,
but must invite Christ to abide in the place of it,
and he must become to me more than vile lust had been;
that his sweetness, power, life may be there.

Thus I must seek a grace from him contrary to sin,
but must not claim it apart from himself.

When I am afraid of evils to come, comfort me by showing me
that in myself I am a dying, condemned wretch,
but in Christ I am reconciled and live;
that in my self I find insufficiency and no rest,
but in Christ there is satisfaction and peace;
that in myself I am feeble and unable to do good,
but in Christ I have ability to do all things.

Though now I have his graces in part,
I shall shortly have them perfectly in that state
where thou wilt show thyself fully reconciled,
and alone sufficient,
efficient,
loving me completely,
with sin abolished.

O Lord, hasten that day.

But above all else, pray and ask God to part the waters of this person's heart and finally deliver him from the enemy of his soul.

— Marshall Segal
desiringGod.org



Scan to read the article:
"The Grace of Good Rebuke"

awAward



Week 16

2 Corinthians 12:11-13:14

*Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith.
Test yourselves.*

— 2 Corinthians 13:5

SERMON NOTES

WEEK 16 | July 21, 2024

BIG IDEA

NOTES

RESPONSE

S Soak

Read the passage slowly **asking the Holy Spirit to open it to you**. What from its surroundings or style is important?

O Observe

Take note of what is there. What is going on? **What seems significant?** Do you have any questions you'd like to ask the author?

M Meaning

Think through **why this is in the Bible**. What is the author trying to say? What is the main point of the passage? How does God work and where is His grace?

A Apply

The **goal is transformation**. How will the meaning of this passage transform your head (knowledge/beliefs), heart (desires/attitudes), and hands (actions/habits)?

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Day 1

2 Corinthians 12:11-18

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Finish your time in prayer.

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Finish your time in prayer.

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Finish your time in prayer.

S**O****M****A**

Finish your time in prayer.

S**O****M****A**

Finish your time in prayer.

Group Discussion

WEEK 16

INTRO DISCUSSION

What is the most difficult letter or email you've had to write?

Have you ever had a difficult person that you just couldn't give up on?

OPEN SHARING (use these questions to look back at your O, M & As of your devotions)

How did God get your attention this week in your devotional reading?

Was there any specific way you wanted to apply your reading into your life?

FINAL QUESTIONS

These readings clearly voice Paul's uncertainty as to the Corinthian response.

What do you see as some of the biggest problems?

Why do you think Paul keeps working so hard on a very difficult, unruly, and disrespectful group?

At the center of this is a call to "examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith." If you examine your actions and your obedience, how would it go? Would you pass "the test"?

Restoration is a key factor for Paul. What kind of restoration do you need? What kind of grace will it require?

PRAYER

God of grace, God of restoration, God of truth. It boggles the mind to see Paul's heart and determination to restore this wayward and rebellious people back to Christ, even though they have chiefly worked to attack him. Help me to be resolute with the people God has entrusted to me. Help us to be full of grace and willing to lean into the awkward, the painful, the unthanking work of restoration and relational ministry. Help us to stand for truth, extend love, and live in the power of God. Amen.

Notes/Prayers

WEEK 16

YOUR TURN

What was something you learned about God, grace, or yourself during this series?

I'd love to know your thoughts! Send an email to Pastor Derick: dzeulner@southshores.org



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CHURCH



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