



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 165– Reimagining Quiet Time with Emily E. Ryan

Elisa Morgan, Eryn Adkins & Vivian Mabuni with Emily Ryan

[Music]

Emily: It was enough for me to think, *Well, God promised something good from this. So I'm going to start looking for that.* And again, this is...it's not like the next day everything's perfect, but it was just enough to start watching for it. And I do know that if you open your eyes, and you expect the presence of the Lord, if you expect Him to speak and Him to guide you and Him to give you the comfort that you need, then it just kind of builds after each other. One thing builds after another, and you begin ... your heart just begins to recognize Him because He's been there the whole time.

[Theme Music]

Elisa: You're listening to *God Hears Her*, a podcast for women where we explore the stunning truth that God hears you. Join our community of encouraging one another and learning to lean on God through Scripture, story, and conversation at Godhearsher.org. God hears her. Seek and she will find.

Vivian: Well, hello everyone. So excited to have a conversation today with Emily E. Ryan. She is a minister's wife, a mother of four, a junior high English teacher; and she has been writing to the Lord since an early age, even as a child. She's in the season of life that probably many of us can relate to, full of teens and tweens and noise and chaos. And what I love about our conversation is that Emily is going to talk about something that I think we all struggle with as women who want to walk with Jesus, and that is really what it looks like to not be guilt motivated. And so Emily has written an upcoming book called *Guilt-Free Quiet Times* where she encourages women with practical creativity to ditch the guilt and to embrace grace in their devotional time with the Lord. And I'm just so excited for our conversation. So welcome Emily.

Eryn: Yes, welcome!

Emily: Thank you for having me. I'm so thrilled to get to talk to y'all today.



Vivian: To just begin with, Emily, we'd love to hear a little bit of your spiritual journey and even this whole embracing of what it looks like to really walk with the Lord in a way that's not based on fear and guilt.

Emily: Well, as far as how I met the Lord, I did not... I was not born into a Christian home, and so my parents were not believers. They were... they believed in God, but they didn't really know what it was like to have a personal relationship with Him. And so I was a product of something that we had in the 1980s called a bus ministry. I don't know if y'all have heard of that, but literally, this church had like a fleet of buses. And they would come around on Saturdays, knocking on doors, inviting kids to jump on these random buses, and parents let their kids go. [Laughter] ... And so that's what I did. The minute I was old enough, I started getting on this bus and went to this church, and that's where I learned about Jesus. And for me, it was very easy to accept everything that I had learned because I hadn't ever been conditioned otherwise. And it was just freeing. It was very real. It was very childlike, and in God's sovereignty, He made the buses stop coming to my neighborhood. And they had like kind of a switch. Another church came and all that. Well, I didn't like the other church. And so I asked my parents if they would just take me and just be my ride. And so my dad started doing that. And one day he was like, "I'm not going to waste the gas." And he just stayed. And whenever he stayed that day, he came home, told my mom, "We're all going next week." And the same people who led me to the Lord actually came to our house and led them to the Lord also. So that's kind of, you know, it's a really neat story about how everybody's unique. And in that time and season, that's exactly what I needed. After my parents came to know the Lord, they really started jumping in and I could see... I was old enough to see them change, you know, so I could...

Eryn: You remember the difference...

Emily: ...see the evidence of their salvation, even as a child. And we were not perfect at all. Obviously, we're falling, we're failing, we're figuring it all out together. And then whenever I was 10, my mom passed away very suddenly. So it was very... All of this kind of happened very quickly after each other. And I had enough of a foundation then to think, *well, God's in this somehow*. Like I didn't know exactly how or what, but I knew that He was there somehow. And so I just kind of opened my heart to be looking for Him, and I found Him. He shows Himself to us whenever we ask for our spiritual eyes to be open. And I didn't know all the language. I wasn't like I was that wise as a child or anything. It's just the childlike faith. You don't really know enough to question the truth. And that's such a blessing sometimes.

Eryn: Yeah. Emily, I'm struck by the sudden tragedy that you have in your life that you continued to persevere with faith, because I feel like at that young of age, the temptation would be to bail from your faith because of the... the tragedy. Was there something that was modeled in your life to persevere? Or was it something that you just knew about God in or...



Emily: Well, it was actually kind of strange because I had heard, I mean, at this time, I knew no one who had gone through any sort of a tragedy like this. And so the only thing that I had heard on the periphery was *when such and such happened, I hated God*. Like that was the narrative that I kind of had heard played out. But what was strange is that I didn't hate God. Like I really had this, I was like, *well, should I, you know, like, is that what I should be doing? Is that the proper reaction?* And I remember one night going over to a friend's house. And our moms had been great friends, very, very close. And she said, "You know, Emily, I've been struggling with what has happened, really just asking God why. And so I was reading my Bible the other day, and He gave me this verse that just really helped me. Do you want me to show... to share it with you?" And I was like, "Yes, please. That'd be great." And so she went and she got her Bible, and she started flipping through it. And she never found this magic verse. She... and it was kind of like a "Well, I can't find it. If I find it, I'll get back to you" kind of a thing. And it was enough for me to incline my own ear to: what did I know about the Scriptures? And I didn't know much at that age, but I had been in a choir program as a child where we had kind of done this thing where we had marched around, and we had chanted Romans 8 28, "for we know that all things work together for those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose." And so that Scripture was embedded in my heart. And in... that very night, I remember going to sleep and thinking about what she had said, being frustrated that she couldn't find this verse. And the Holy Spirit just brought that verse to my heart. And it was enough for me to think, *well, God promised something good from this*.

Vivian: Wow!

Emily: *...so I'm going to start looking for that*. And again, this is... it's not like the next day everything's perfect, but it was just enough to start watching for it. And I do know that if you open your eyes, and you expect the presence of the Lord, if you expect Him to speak and Him to guide you and Him to give you the comfort that you need, then it just kind of builds after each other. One thing builds after another, and you begin ... your heart just begins to recognize Him because He's been there the whole time.

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: That's right. It's really hitting me right now, Emily, of the ability that we can see back, and how hindsight is 20/20, but how kind of the Lord that He allowed the bus ministry to scoop you up, to bring both your parents to faith before your mom went to...

Emily: Yes.



Vivian: ...really, truly go home to be with the Lord. And it's like, there's... there's such a kindness of the Lord in, even in the midst of such devastation...

Emily: Mm-hmm. I thank Him for that repeatedly, all the time.

Vivian: Right? It's just amazing. So here you are as a little girl learning to walk with Jesus, understanding that we are to seek for Him, look for Him, be in His Word, grow in our faith through the... just our ability to read and meditate and journal and all of that. Catch us up a little bit with how...

Emily: Okay.

Vivian: ...it brought you to the place where you wrote your book and have been...

Emily: No problem.

Vivian: ...writing devotionals. Yes.

Emily: Well, I have always had a thirst for the Lord, and so — and for His Word — but I'm also a book nerd, and so that kind of comes hand in hand. So I always kind of tried, but it took me a long time. Even as much as I love the Bible, it took me a long time to actually read it, you know? And so for many years, I thought *I should have done this already. I should have done this already. Why is it taking me so long?* You know, there's this kind of thing. I had always...

Eryn: Like a condemning voice almost...

Emily: ... Yes. Exactly, exactly. And I'd always... anytime I was in youth group or whatever, and people would talk about like how to have a quiet time, or how to spend time with the Lord, I always leaned forward. I'm like, *this is something that I want to do*. And I would very much take notes, and I would try in my own power to do it. And I would have growth, but I was never perfectly consistent. I just really wasn't. And it was this kind of like secret sin, you know, I'm like, *somebody is going to find me out that, you know, I haven't read my Bible in two days*, or whatever it was. You know, it could very much have been more dramatic than that, like, *oh, it's been a month*. Like there were those seasons whenever it happened. And then in my twenties, a series of events happened kind of at the same time. So I got married, and my husband's a minister, so suddenly I'm a minister's wife — heh, heh...

Vivian: Pastor's wife!



Eryn: Did you ever think that that would happen?

Emily: No, not at all. That was not on my radar. And so I became a minister's wife, and then... that's when, about whenever I wrote my first book, as well, which is in the Christian... It was about Judges 11. It was like a Christian book and all that kind of thing. And after all those things happened, I thought, *well, now I should really be, you know, one of these perfect Christian women who never falters, who never fails, who consistently every morning gets up and does all the things that I've been taught that we should do. What if they knew... what if they knew that I still struggled with this, and I'm not perfect and consistent?* I felt like I would be a fraud, you know, exposed on the pulpit or something like that. And so I just kind of carried that with me. It wasn't something that debilitated me. It was just one of these things that was an underlying current of guilt, all the time, all the way. It's kind of like mom guilt, but on a spiritual level where you're like, *no matter what I'm doing, it's just not going to be enough* and all of that. And so that's about where I was whenever, in God's sovereignty, the cool thing was that He brought me to a season where I was surrounded by Christian women. And the funny thing is that I had just had my fourth child. And I remember specifically, I'd had all my children via C-section; and so C-sections, you know, they're very hard to... to recover from. And so, after the fourth one, you know, I was at home. All the kids were six and under, so it was very, it was like, bam, bam, bam, one right after the other. And I was still recovering. My husband was at home, and after you have a C-section, you know, your body kind of does not bounce back perfectly, and everything is still kind of asleep. You have to kind of wake it up a little bit. And so I remember being in pain and I'm... and I had to go to the restroom. You know, it's one of those things when things just have to start working again, but it also takes a... takes a little bit of concentration because your body is not where it should be. And so I got all the kids like situated. They're all doing the things, you know? And I'm like, *okay, everything is going to be okay now. And I'm gonna be able to... to take care of myself.* And so I shuffle, you know, holding my insides together, and I shuffled to our little bathroom and I closed the door, and I'm like, *okay, I'm finally got some time alone.* And, of course, what happens to any mother whenever...

Eryn: Knock, knock, knock, knock. "MOM!"

Vivian: The little fingers are under the door...

Emily: "Mom, Mom!" Yes, they find you. And I don't know why, but I remember it as clear as day. For some reason in that moment when I'm like, *maybe later, you know, never mind,* I'm getting myself back together, walking out the door. And I just hear this whisper in my mind that's like, *And you're not even having a quiet time right now. Who do you think you are?* And that was not the Lord.



Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: Right.

Emily: That was the enemy — one hundred percent. But it was this heaping amount of guilt on me. I'd had a friend just ...um... a few years earlier who had invited me to a party. And this was right after my first son was born. I was breastfeeding. I was doing all the things, and I couldn't go. There was just no way. It was like "oh, the party starts at nine o'clock." I'm like, "no, no, we don't do that anymore."

Eryn: Yeah, right.

Emily: You know. I'm... I'm in bed by nine. It was all my old single friends that I still loved and cared for and wanted to see, but I couldn't go. And she told me later, she said, "Well, it's fine. I know if you really wanted to be there, you would have made a way." We've gotten past that, but that's how I felt like the Lord was looking at me sometimes.

Vivian: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Emily: *Mm... if you really wanted to be with Me, you'd find a way to manage all the things, all the kids, all the schedules.*

Eryn: And you'd learn how to be perfect so you can do those things, right?

Emily: Yes. Yes.

Vivian: Wow!

Emily: Yes. And the truth is some women do in fact share that narrative...

Eryn: Right

Vivian: True.

Emily: ... you know, like *do more, be more, try harder. And if it's not working, then that's a you problem, you know, like, what is it that's in your life that, you know, you need to change or you need to fix? or something like that.*



Eryn: Yeah.

Emily: And we hear that sometimes as women, and it's a sad reality, but it is a reality. Something that I think that we need to be a little bit more open about and talking about.

Vivian: Yeah. I think what's so interesting is the way that that cycle ends up working out is that the more guilt I feel, the less I want to do the very thing that I actually want to do.

Emily: Yes!

Vivian: So it's not that I don't want to spend time with the Lord, in this case, but it's like the guilt actually prevents me because I'm feeling so much condemnation. And it just cycles out in the worst of ways...

Emily: One hundred percent!

Vivian: ... you know? So how did you learn to kind of shift the narrative?

Emily: Well, the first thing I did was I started listening to other women. Whenever I was in that season where I was working at nonprofit ministry, and I was surrounded by just a handful of women who are at a little bit of different stage of life, a little bit ahead of me. Their children were a little bit older. And so I just asked them questions, just to kind of see what they would say, you know, just kind of like not pointed questions but more indirect. And I started learning that they weren't perfect either. And these were women that I so respected, like amazing, godly women. I knew that they were growing in their faith, all the things, but I learned that they weren't perfect because we were together every day, and we were able to talk about those things openly. And so once I had that kind of, *Oh, wait, maybe I'm not the only one...*

Eryn: Yeah.

Vivian: Mm-hmm.

Emily: ... then I started looking a little bit more into history and into the Scripture. And so, historically, I wanted to figure out, *well, where did this idea of quiet time come from?* And it's not...the term, the expression "quiet time" is not in the Bible. That was a huge, you know, revelation for me. It actually was coined in about the 1940s when there was just a little 30- or so page pamphlet that was like "How to Have a Daily Devotional Quiet Time." And that was kind of when this term took off. Before then they called it something like "a morning watch," and it was more intercessory. You pray for those people who are



waking up, going into battle, or doing all the things. And in the 1940s was whenever it started changing a little bit into this idea of a daily Bible study meditation time. And that's just the term that happened to catch on.

Eryn: Yeah.

Emily: And so in my mind, I was like, *well, what did they do until 1945?* Obviously, the Bible was in existence this whole time. Did we have it wrong? Because if this is the pillar of Christianity is having this amazing quiet time, then what were they doing for all these centuries? And that was, you know, just kind of a disconnect. And, you know, and then I started thinking, *well, what about ... what about people who don't have access to a Bible?* Does that mean that they can't grow in their faith? What about people who have learning disabilities and can't read, or they struggle to read? Does that mean... you know, like what is... cause I'm a very practical person. I'm like, *let's get down to the nitty gritty.* And so the term "quiet time" wasn't working anymore because I didn't feel like that was exactly what, you know, like this compartmentalized moment where every day you have this routine, you have this structure, you have this unbendable framework that you follow day after day after day, and that leads to the growth. You know, I was like, *is that what I'm wanting, the framework and the checklist? Or is there something deeper?* Well, when you look into Scripture, you realize, *Oh, there's something deeper.* And God is not calling us into this perfect little checklist quiet time. He's calling us into a deeper, intimate relationship with Him.

Eryn: Yeah.

Emily: And then I was able to say, *okay, well, what is it? Let me just look at the Scripture.* And I did, I just started reading the Bible from those questions. Well, you know, how does God spend time with His people? How did Jesus spend time with the Father? How did the disciples spend time with Jesus? All of those things. And it wasn't formulaic at all. It was relational. It was invitational. He actually preached against the Pharisee's rituals and routines and all of these things because their heart wasn't in it. And so my heart became way more important than the act of this perfect little structural quiet time thing that I had been kind of... that I had absorbed as a early Christian.

Vivian: Wow! I spent 28 years in campus ministry, working with college students and helping them to form some spiritual disciplines, helping them to learn how to get into the Scriptures. But there really was a sense that to really walk with God, it required an hour at Starbucks and journaling for so long and then reading something from the Old Testament, something from the New Testament. And... and it...

Emily: A Psalm, a Proverb...



Vivian: [laughing]... yeah, a Psalm and a Proverb. But you know, like there are 31 Proverbs and 31 days in the month, you know. So on one hand I do see the benefit of being in the Scriptures and all that stuff. I know that that's not what you're saying at all, Emily; but it was for me when I became a young mom, I felt rattled because I didn't have the capacity to go for an hour to Starbucks to do what I had done for all these previous years. And so I'd be curious with — what are some practical ways for women, especially when they're in the throes of just life in 2024 with, you know, the fingers underneath the door and, you know, just all the things, how does someone who wants to cultivate intimacy with God, what are some ways and perspectives to kind of maybe shift our thinking?

Emily: Well, I would encourage you first of all, to read Matthew 14. It's... or the beginning of it. It's the story that we all know and love about Jesus feeding the 5,000. Okay. We are very familiar with that story. But what happened before was that, that's when Jesus learned about John the Baptist being beheaded. And if you look at the story, what you see is that He learned about this horrible thing; and He, in that moment, He withdrew to spend time with His Father. That's what He wanted to do. The crowds followed Him. They followed Him. They were thirsty. They were hungry for the Word, for the message. And if I had projected my thoughts and feelings, as far as, you know, the... the guilt that I felt early on, I would expect Jesus to be like, *well, thanks a lot. You just ruined what I was trying to do. I was trying to get alone with My Father. I was trying to have my time, my solitude, the quiet, the connection, all of that, and y'all ruined it.*

Eryn: Yeah.

Emily: That's not what Jesus did at all. Instead, He met their needs. He did what He needed to do. He took care of the blessings that God had given Him, the people around Him. And He fed the 5,000. There was a huge miracle, but the story doesn't stop there. After He dismissed the people, it says, then He went and got with His Father. And it was evening by then; so in my mind, as a young mom, I'm like, *Oh, this is what you do.* Like your heart intends... don't eradicate all of those plans that you have, like keep the plans. Try to, you know, always be trying to be in the Word, to be diligent in your studies, to do all the things like, yes, let's not put that away. But hold it loosely, you know. The Lord puts other responsibilities, He does all the things. We're not just spiritual beings. We're also physical beings and relational beings. And so we have to deal with all of those things at the same time. But the Lord never turned His heart away from that connection. You know, He was always headed in that direction. And so that's kind of how I feel now. I am always headed in the direction to meet with My Father, to spend time with Him. The interruptions that I'm feeling, they're not guilt-ridden shame moments. They're not these moments that declare, *Oh, you're so bad.* It's an interruption and that's it. And then you get back on track, you know, you get back with the Lord. And so that's one thing is I've just kind of changed my expectations in my



heart. He's on a throne of grace. We can approach Him confidently, and He gives mercy and grace generously to us. And so I try not to forget that, like that's where I want my time with the Lord to be motivated. It's by, you know, grace and it's not by guilt at all. And so once I was able to put that aside, it actually became very much fun again to spend time with God because I don't compartmentalize. For example, right now I'm in summer. I'm a teacher, so I'm able to spend a lot of time with God during these two months that I have off. And so I'm doing more in-depth Bible studies, and, you know, tonight we're doing a VBS thing where we get to dance. And I get to worship like with my whole body, and that's super fun, and that's exciting. And I love this season, but then I know that the fall will come, and my schedule will be stricter and tighter. And so I have to be a little bit more creative. I feel like the Lord has given us so much more choice into how we approach our spiritual disciplines than we realize. And so it can be in a small whisper. Like sometimes when I am teaching, and we have our moment of silence over the intercom, those can be some of my most heartfelt prayers ever. It's like 30 seconds where I'm like, *God, I need You today. Please let me show Your love to these kids who don't know You.* You know, like that's a moment. And then my car, that's another place, like that can be church for me. My car can be the place where I listen to the Word of God, where I, you know, praise Him when I sing, when I do all these things. Or it could be going for a walk and spending time with God in nature, or painting, or writing, or all of those things. Everybody's different, and that's, I think, what is so beautiful about the Lord is that He can meet us where we are and allow us to connect with Him. That's just more relational anyway.

Vivian: And it's seasonal too. I mean...

Emily: It is. It is.

Vivian: ... I just feel like that's... that's something that I think we miss out on because we don't function in an agrarian society, most of us don't. So we don't really recognize that there are seasons of life and busyness.

Eryn: I would love to know what the voice sounds like where there is a difference between being guilt motivated and accountability and consistency, or maybe it's discipline.

Emily: I think there's a difference between guilt and conviction.

Eryn: Yeah. Okay. What's that?



Emily: So guilt ... guilt makes you think it's got to be all or nothing, and there is no solution. But the Holy Spirit, He can convict you. He can tell you the same thing, like, *Hey girl, it's time to open your Bible*. But He's not saying *open it for an hour or you're condemned*. He's saying, *let's spend time together*. And whenever we have conviction, it always leads to solutions. So the Holy Spirit, if He convicts your heart... if He convicts your heart on something where you're not spending enough time with Him, or you really are withdrawing or disconnecting, then He's doing so because He wants to lead you closer.

Eryn: Yeah.

Emily: But guilt is... it piles on that shame where you're like, no matter what I do, like I want to hide my face. I'm not going to be compelled to move forward to the Lord. I'm going to be compelled to turn my back on Him. And so I get convicted all the time. I get convicted about, *Hey, I really do want to go deeper. I need to pray for that person that I said I was going to pray for them. And I haven't done that*. Like I do all those things, but the conviction is leading me closer to the Lord so that I can do the thing that God is convicting me to do versus that shame of, *Oh, well, I'm such a failure. Never mind. I'm not even going to try. I can't do it right, so I might as well just not do it at all*. I love the life of Peter because he was so up and down. And whenever I look at his life in comparison to my own, it kind of has the same ups and downs. But one of the images that I have in my mind that really kind of helps me is — it's crazy, but I'd worked in finance for many years. And so we would study the stock market and talk about investing and all that stuff. And so whenever I would have someone who was just a little bit leery about investing, I would always pull out the historical market and just look at the charts. Like, well, what does the chart do over history? And historically you see big highs and big lows and big highs and big lows. But if you look at the trend line, there's always a trend line of growth. Okay? And so that's how it is for me now. I am not now looking at my life based on, *Oh, this was a great time with the Lord. Oh, I really blew it. Oh, this was amazing! Oh, I'm so horrible*. Like I'm not doing that anymore. I'm looking at the bigger picture over time: Am I growing in my faith? Cause Peter talks about how we should be. It's in increasing measure, that you should always be growing in your faith over time. But we can't forget that “time” aspect. Time is very important. It's not every single moment. Every single moment I might mess up, but I'm coming to the Lord and I'm saying, *okay, over time, I should be growing*. The difference is when we have the highs and the lows, kind of like a roller coaster. You kind of... you have the same highs and lows. But a rollercoaster does not trend up. You always end the ride exactly where you started. There is no growth. And so...

Vivian: Oh, that's a good word picture. Yes!

Emily: Yeah. The highs and lows are... They're going to happen regardless. It's where are they leading you to the end? You know, are you trending up? Are you seeking the Lord? And is your faith growing?



Eryn: Right. It's going deeper into my faith.

Emily: And He lets you know if it's not. He lets you know, and you listen. You listen, you listen through Scripture, and He will totally let you know

Vivian: The highs and the lows kind of trending, to me, communicates integration, where we're not all good or all bad; and that there's a sense that we're okay because we're rooted in the love of God. He loves us. His Spirit dwells in us, will convict us. We have relationship. It's about intimacy. And then there's this integration piece where we don't have to split off and condemn ourselves, or feel pride, you know, for being like all that. So... so there is this freedom because there are some among us who are listening who are very disciplined, and that's how God has wired them to be that way. And so God bless you, those of you who wake up at five in the morning before the noise, and you love that time of intimacy with the Lord. Praise God! And for the majority of us who aren't wired that way, it doesn't mean that we were less spiritual or less-than Christians. So that's such an important and great message. I appreciate that so much. Emily.

Emily: You're welcome. And if anybody is struggling, I would just encourage them: This is something that you can actually talk to God about, you know, like whatever it is that you are struggling with, whether it's consistency or having a desire to read the Word or how you pray. Like whatever it is, you can actually talk to God about those things. He can work with you through them. It's not like you have to go and figure it out on your own and then come to Him. You know, I would declare today a reset for either five seconds or five minutes or however long you time. Say, *okay, God, today's a new day. What's in the past is in the past, and I do want to grow in my faith. Give me the people. Give me the resources. Give me the Scripture. Help me through that. I don't know what I'm doing. Can You please continue to help me through that?* And God will do that, cause He's the one extending the invitation to us, and so He'll meet you where you are. And He will guide you into that path of growth in your faith. I have a hundred percent confidence in that.

[Theme music]

Eryn: I love learning that our time with God doesn't have to be "quiet time." We should all try a new way of spending time with God by using our gifts and hobbies.

Vivian: That's a great idea, Eryn. Well, before we go, be sure to check out the pre-order link for Emily's book, *Guil-Free Quiet Times*. You can find that and more at GodhearsHer.org. That's godhearsHer.org.



Eryn: And if you liked this episode, or you've been listening to the show for a bit, please leave us a rating and review wherever you get your podcasts. We want to hear back from you. Remember, you're part of the conversation too.

Vivian: Thank you for joining us. And don't forget: God hears you, He sees you, and He loves you because you are His.

Eryn: Today's episode was engineered by Anne Stephens and produced by Jade Gustman and Mary Jo Clark. We also want to thank Kelly and JR for all their help and support. Thanks everyone.

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[ODB Theme music]

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