

Irony – You Become What You Worship

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MAIN VERSES

[Jonah 1](#) • [Genesis 27](#) • [Genesis 37](#) • [Matthew 26](#) • [Psalm 51](#) • [2 Samuel 11](#) • [2 Samuel 13](#) • [Psalm 115](#) • [Psalm 135](#) • [Isaiah 6](#) • [Isaiah 42](#) • [Psalm 75](#) • [Deuteronomy 29](#) • [1 Corinthians 8](#) • [Matthew 11](#) • [Isaiah 35](#) • [Isaiah 61](#) • [Isaiah 32](#)

Well, Shabbat Shalom, everybody. I'm so excited to be here today once again as a community of God's people. And if this is your first time visiting today or watching online, well, we are a community built up of individuals with diverse backgrounds, coming from a lot of different places, who love the Sabbath. We find joy in the entirety of the Word of God. But first and foremost, we're a community that seeks to orbit the person of Yeshua in every way possible. So welcome to Founded in Truth Fellowship.

We find ourselves in a series on the literary device of irony, specifically how it's found saturating the Bible. There are several different forms of it, and we went over a lot of different examples last week, but it's just everywhere in the Bible.

Jonah and the Irony of Disobedience

In the book of Jonah, Jonah attempts to flee from God's command to prophesy the destruction of Nineveh, fearing the people's repentance and God's subsequent mercy. Ironically, his disobedience leads to his ordeal in the belly of a big fish, and eventually he goes to Nineveh where he gives a five-word sermon in Hebrew. And he says, "40 days or the destruction's going to come." That's it. And it leads to the city's repentance and God's mercy being poured out—the exact outcome he was trying to avoid. It's a story that is saturated with irony.

The prophet named the dove isn't the first to actually pray to God. It's the pagan sailors, not pirates—too many VeggieTales. It was the pagan sailors on the ship who are the first in the story to praise God. It's the irony. The author was very intentional about making you go, oh, man, this is so good. And there's a point to that. But he goes and he gives a five-word sermon. Minimal. Minimal effort. If I have to do this, minimal effort. And he speaks five words. Forty

days, you'll be overthrown. And they repent. The king repents. I mean, the cows and the camels put on sackcloth and repent. Like, it's what it says. But what's the king? The king declares. He says, "Let them all be covered with sackcloth, both man and beast. And let them cry out to Almighty God. Let them turn everyone from his evil way." The camels and the cows were wearing sackcloth in Nineveh. And it just shows the point of everything Jonah didn't want to happen, happened even to the cat that knocks the glasses off the countertop. Repentance filled the whole city.

Jacob, in Genesis, Jacob deceives his father, Isaac, to receive the blessing, right, by dressing up as his brother. And the irony is, later, Jacob's own sons deceive him by making him believe that Joseph is dead. Judas Iscariot, Judas, the bad guy, right? He betrays Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, leading to Yeshua's crucifixion. And the irony lies in Judas's betrayal—it sets the stage for the resurrection to happen. It's a central event in our belief. It's built on this ironic turn. Irony.

Last week we spoke on the irony of God's judgment. God tends to judge people based on their own sin. What they plant is what they will grow. What they cook is what they're going to eat, right? King David has his armed soldiers go and tell Bathsheba to come to the king, right? She's power raped. And then he murders her husband to try to cover it up. And Nathan says, "For the rest of your days, it's all going to be filled with echoes of this event. All of this that you've done here will echo throughout your life and your own family." And then you turn to the very next chapter, and his son, Amnon, seeks his half-sister sexually. So he pretends he's sick, and then he has David go and tell Tamar to come to him like David did with his soldiers. And after he does this, he rapes her, and then David does nothing about it except get mad—because he has his sights on the kingship and the lineage, right? Don't want to mess that up. So David doesn't even act kingly at that point. No, his other son, Absalom, is the one who acts kingly two years later when he kills Amnon for this sin. But then he himself dies. And so it's just complete chaos in David's life, echoing what he planted is what he's sowing. It's an ironic inversion of the Bathsheba story.

We Become What We Worship

And so today we're going to explore irony in idol worship. In this principle of irony that we see, we tend to become what we worship. That's a pattern throughout the Bible. But not only that, in our own lives. We tend to resemble what we revere, as Greg Beal would say, a Christian scholar. How about the story of Lance Armstrong?

Who knows who Lance Armstrong is? Younger? No. He was a professional road racing cyclist who fell from grace. And it's one of the most dramatic stories in sports history. Lance, for a time, was the world's most revered and honored cyclist. He won the Tour de France, one of the most prestigious cycling events, seven times between 1999 and 2005. He did so after successfully battling testicular cancer that I believe had spread to his lungs and his brain, if I'm not mistaken. Just a remarkable comeback story—it made him this huge international icon and a symbol of hope and resilience. However, his story took a dark turn when allegations started coming out about doping, taking performance-enhancing drugs during these races or to prepare for these races. Now, for years, he strongly denied any accusations and went to great lengths to maintain his image as this clean athlete who was a cancer survivor. But yeah, he built his life around the idolization, the pursuit of victory and perfection at any cost. He sought to be the epitome of a resilient hero. This image—the unbeatable champion. Yet in his relentless pursuit of this image, he became the embodiment of the very thing that he claimed to fight against: dishonesty and cheating in sports. He idolized being a winner, and he became one at any cost. He lost himself to the music and the moment and all of it.

And in 2012, after a thorough investigation, the United States Anti-Doping Agency—you'd think they would have had a different name—found Armstrong guilty of using performance-enhancing drugs throughout his career, and they stripped him of all seven Tour de France titles. He was also banned from professional cycling for life. And in 2013, after years of denial, he came on the Oprah Winfrey show and admitted, "Yeah, I was using the drugs." The narrative twist of this story is devastating, not just for Armstrong, but for the millions of fans worldwide that were cheering him on. I mean, this is a real-life underdog story. His unwavering pursuit of victory led him down a path that eventually brought about his downfall. And this is just another example in human history of the principle of irony. And I think maybe we all have our own story somewhere where we've experienced this.

We Mimic What We Worship

Because we mimic what we want, right? We mimic what we want. Whether it's status, whether it's power, wealth, we tend to resemble what we worship. And it's natural, right? It makes it so much harder to discern and navigate because it's natural.

Ever notice your kids mimic you, right? It's all fun and games, so they start mimicking your humor. Oh no. But they're watching. They're watching because they want to be just like you. So they try to become you. Your personality is generally a combination of the three to five closest friends that you have right now. We mimic. You wear the clothes that you do because you're

trying to imitate someone or something. There's a reason why you're in your mid-30s or 40s wearing cargo shorts and dad tennis shoes. Maybe you're trying to be just like your dad, or maybe you're trying to embody the teenage version of yourself that you formed by mimicking someone else. I like to wear cargo shorts. That's me. That's right. Part of the club. We got it. And it's not bad, right? But when we turn it into worship, we see it goes downhill to our demise.

And idolatry in its basic sense is turning your reverence away from God and putting it into something else. It's when we are no longer committed to the mission of who we are in response to who God is. That's when we start treading the waters of idolatry. And so we turn to another to fill those spaces of worth or worth-ship or worship.

They Resemble the Idols They Portray

Speaking of pagan nations that worship idols, [Psalm 115](#) speaks about God's judgment on them. And starting in verse 4, it says, "But their idols are silver and gold made by human hands. They have mouths but cannot speak. They have eyes but they can't see. They have ears but they can't hear. Noses, they can't smell. They have hands but they cannot feel. Feet, they can't walk. Nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them will be saved." So [Psalm 115](#) concludes with the climactic thought that these pagan nations that make and shape these idols and worship them, they will become like those very idols. They'll mimic them spiritually, of course, as they turn to stone. And this is launching from last week's message. It seems the judgment for the nations for worshiping idols will be that they will become like them for their own ruin. God judges based on what sins we—that's how God's judgment presents itself. They resemble the idols they portray. You're going to have mouths, can't speak. Eyes, not going to be able to see. Ears, can't hear, and so on.

[Psalm 135](#) uses the same language here. There's a little bit of a shift, though. Starting in verse 14, it says, "Oh, who are we talking about now? We're not talking about pagan nations anymore. Uh-oh, it's all fun and games when he's talking about them. It's good. Okay, but this language is repetitive. Yes, everyone who trusts in them. Do you feel the tone? It's like the Lord's going to judge his people." But yeah, all these nations are doing this stuff with the idols and everything.

And those who make them will be just like them. Yes, everyone who trusts them. You can almost see the psalmist, like looking at Israel. Everyone who trusts them, not just them. I love the shift. God is allowing them to become what they want to worship, even Israel. But what we start seeing is this reference. Eyes that don't see. Ears that don't hear. Noses don't smell. We see

these phrases throughout the Bible, and they're all connected, I would assert. They're best understood as metaphors for idolatry. In every instance, you will become the idol, which is great at first, right? But what is the destiny of an idol in the story of God? It's always going to be destroyed in the end. Always. When you pursue something that is lifeless, you will become lifeless spiritually because you've detached yourself from the very thing, the ruach, right? Ruach, the life-giving, animating spirit. You've detached yourself from it. You've traded it for something else. What else would you become?

And maybe that's something familiar to you today. We all have our pursuits. We all have our struggles. But sometimes the struggle that is in your life—which could just be a nice way of saying sin. I'm struggling with X, Y, Z. Maybe you are struggling, or maybe it's not a struggle. That's just the idol that you've chosen to worship. The struggle you perceive as you is not it. What you're perceiving is you changing. You are morphing into it. And God is saying, wake up to the reality that this doesn't have to be a struggle because you do not have to worship this anymore.

Eyes that Don't See

Let's turn to Isaiah chapter 6, starting in verse 9. And here's what the prophet says. The first six chapters is kind of Isaiah's journey of becoming the prophet. God's speaking to him, and he says, Go and tell this people, be ever hearing, but don't you ever understand. Be ever seeing, but never perceiving. All right, so we have this language again. Make the heart of this people calloused. Make their ears dull. Close their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes. These people might hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and they may turn and be healed. And then I said, for how long, Lord? How long do I tell these people to close their eyes? And he answered, until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitants, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged.

This is God's judgment going forth through Isaiah. Seems a little harsh, right? God's telling Isaiah to go and tell the people, make sure they don't repent. Make sure they keep their eyes closed. Make sure they keep their ears closed. How long are we going to do this, God? Until it's wiped out.

Earlier in the chapter, Isaiah is one of the ones that repents. And he says, God, my lips are unclean just like everyone else's. I don't even know how to interact with you. I don't know how to do this because I'm a sinner just like everyone else. And then a neat little scene happens. God sends a seraphim, this heavenly cosmic creature with a hot coal from the altar with tongs,

which I love that it said the creature had to hold tongs, like it was too hot for him to just hold, it being cosmic heavenly. Anyway, he had tongs, and he put it to the lips of Isaiah, and it purified his lips, if you will. It made him clean. He said, now your sins are atoned for. So it kind of changed his status. And that's when Isaiah steps up, and God calls him forth as the prophet to go out. Wow. And then God sends him out. But yeah, that's the announcement. Close your eyes and your mouth so you cannot even ask for forgiveness.

Why is it so harsh? Well, if we understand the timeline, this event comes after hundreds and hundreds of years of unrepentant sin of Israel. So it's not out of the blue. But this is the declaration of guilt coming upon a generation that has not repented. In fact, they have just perpetually gotten worse and worse and worse. And the theme is whenever the prophets refer to organs of the body not working, it's not just sin that's being addressed. It's idolatry specifically. And so this is Isaiah's charge. God is now going to give the people what they've wanted this whole time, and he's going to close the door.

[Isaiah 42:18-20](#) speaks to idol worshipers, and it calls them blind and deaf once again. And so [Isaiah 6:9](#) can be paraphrased. Isaiah, go and tell this idolatrous people that they've been so unrepentant about their idol worship that I'm going to make them as spiritually insensitive as the idols that they have chosen over me, as spiritually inanimate as the idols that they worship. Just like last week, eye for an eye and how judgment comes, Israel is being punished in accordance to their sin.

What We Wanted

You don't want to spend your life in fellowship with me or as my people or a part of my people? Joining me in the mission of new creation? All right, then I'll give you what you wanted, which is separation from me. God gives us what we want. And that's a theme of God's judgment throughout the Bible.

I think Brian and I were speaking last week about the theme or the metaphor of the cup of wrath that is poured out. And we always have this image that God's going to pour out this cup of wrath and it's like boiling lava or acid or something. I don't know. I'm just saying, and he pours it out and he dumps it on everyone. Oh, it's wrath. But at least in [Psalm 75](#), it's not depicted that way at all. Here's what [Psalm 75:8](#) says. This isn't God drowning people in this cup. No, this is an enticing, high-gravity alcoholic beverage that the people want. They want it. The prophets speak about the nations that drink of this, and it talks about them stumbling around in stupor until they fall because they're drunk. The wicked want it. We so want it. And

we're surprised when we're passed out because of it, when it disables us. Foaming wine mixed with spices.

Now this language about eyes that don't see and ears that don't hear actually originates in the Torah. In the book of Deuteronomy, of course. In [Deuteronomy 29:4](#), it says, But to this day, the Lord has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear. All right, we're back in the Torah. This is our comfort zone, right? There we go. Moses is renewing the covenant, just like Katie was saying. He's renewing this covenant, giving this pep talk to Israel. And he's speaking to the first generation out of Egypt. Right?

What did the first generation of Israelites do when they came out of Egypt? They complained a lot. They weren't grateful. But they did something. What did they do? They made something. They made an idol. And so here we go. We have the language. God's telling them, He's like, no, I've not given you eyes to see or ears to hear because that's not who you wanted to be. And what kind of idol did they make? It was gold. It was a calf. This is cow. It's cattle. They worshiped a golden calf.

Or worse, they made God into the type of idol they wanted to worship because they called the golden cow Yahweh. They wanted to re-image God to something that was more in line to the type of living they wanted to justify. They made an idol. This is the type of God that endorses our sin, endorses our pursuit to have power over others, our pursuit to justify judging and sizing up people as beneath us so that we can feel like we're on the top of the Tower of Babel. It's been like that since the beginning. And that's not faith. That's idolatry. It's idol worship of power and self-gain.

If Our God Looks Like Zeus

It's what the Pharisees did. They used concepts like holiness and compromise, and they distorted them, and they made them so ambiguous that only the people that fit the status, their club of holy, could attain it. And anyone else, oh, you're not going to wash your hands before you eat? Oh, you're not in the club. You're so far beneath us. No, surely you're not going to let your disciples eat without washing their hands. What are you talking about? They needed to establish a false sense of self-righteousness and standards of holiness so that they could still be above everyone else.

[Matthew 23](#): you hypocrites. We can also make a golden calf in how we want to respond to conflict. Humility, patience, respect, kindness. But if our God looks like Zeus with a lightning

bolt, then we unlock lightning bolts for us to use, right? And we know what Yeshua says about that, right? If you live by the lightning bolt, you'll die by the lightning bolt.

Christians do not celebrate conflict. We celebrate victory. And victory looks like the kingdom of God being manifest, not a war zone, not demeaning other people, not lifting yourself up as entitled to anything, because as a Christian, you're not entitled to anything. And this is hard for me because that's the whole death to self thing. We hate that, don't we? That's part of the deal. You're not entitled to anything as a Christian. You put that down at Calvary, death to self. Grace and entitlement cannot coexist, but that's uncomfortable because that strips us of power. It strips us of our control.

So we need to get Aaron up here. And we need to give them our bracelets. And we need to say, Aaron, put this in the fire. Make something pop out that we can call Yahweh that lets us keep our power and control. And what was the result when Israel did this with the golden calf? Well, they start being called different things, different attributes. The first one is they are a stiff-necked people. Okay. The next thing they're called, another attribute, is that they are unbound or these people are let loose. It's also said that they quickly turn aside from the way which God commanded them.

Cattle Terms

And they needed to be gathered back together and led again. They're cattle terms. They're cattle terms. They had become as spiritually rebellious as the cattle that was symbolized by the very idol they built. It's why the northern tribes of Israel were also referred by the very same terms later in history. Because after the kingdom split, Jeroboam went up north and made two golden calves, one at Bethel and one at Tel Dan, which we go to those places. But Israel did it again. Times two, right? Insult to injury. Times two. They did it twice. Set up two golden calves.

And then the prophets begin to use these same terms for them. Like a stiff-necked cow. You're wandering over here. I've got to lead you back. You let loose. You're bucking. Stop it, running away, they became what they worshiped. We become what we worship. You become what you worship.

True Idolatry Lives Within

Now, Paul says in [1 Corinthians 8, 4](#), that there's no such thing as an idol in a real literal sense. What he meant was it's meaningless because we know there's only one God. He's charging

Christians. He's like, okay, we're on the same page, right? Like there's only one God. There's no power behind this statue. There's nothing here. It's meaningless is what he says. This is Paul.

I see a lot of people so caught up on trying to fill this role as the most holy person, maybe because I've been one. And we point at everything and we call it an idol, right? Like pictures. It's an idol. Painting. It's an idol. A sculpture. That's an idol. There's a depiction of Yeshua walking with a lamb. It's an idol. Because Paul's already addressed that. What are you talking about? We understand that there's one God.

But with that, Paul reveals an even scarier, more intimidating reality that exists. That although a stone sculpture has no power—there's nothing behind it, there's no little other God spirit that's inhabited it—which is funny.

A Stone Sculpture Has No Power

Paul makes the point because at this point in Jewish history, after Hellenization, they've been exposed to the Greeks. And they're to the point where they're like, we understand our God's the only one. All you guys, that's fine. So it was funny because in Israel, when we go and visit the synagogue remains at the Galilean city of Chorazin... There's a synagogue there which has the seat of Moses. That's a big tourist spot. But if you look on the side of the path, which most people don't really look, you've got the seat of Moses over here. That's what everyone goes to if you've been to Israel. But on the side of the path, they have the old pillars of the synagogue and the decorations of the synagogue from the 3rd, 4th century. And they have depictions of Greek mythology on it. The head of Medusa, the snake-ridden head, was carved into the pillars and the decorations for the synagogue.

Medusa! Those idol-worshipping 3rd, 4th century Jews in the Galilean era? No! No, they... Some Jewish communities, this was not widespread, I guess more liberal communities, some Jewish communities understood that there's only one God, and they felt like they had defeated, they had defeated polytheism in the ancient world. They'd won. We did it. We did it. Especially by the 3rd or 4th century, it's declined, it's out, we've done it.

And so... This was art to them. It was ancient history. It meant nothing but decoration. And that was an accepted practice in some Jewish communities. And I found that fascinating. Do you agree with it or not? It doesn't matter. It happened and it's fascinating. Fascinating. Right? Wrong? Doesn't matter. This was a concept. Yeah, we defeated that. This is a relic. Kind of neat, huh? Used the myths as artwork.

Because it was understood that true idolatry is not within a piece of art or a sculpture or a stone. It's within here. And that's the scary reality that Paul goes on to explain in 1 Corinthians. You wish it was as easy as avoiding a statue. It starts here.

It Starts Here

And Paul is just convinced of this. And that's what he's trying to pour out to the communities when they have the controversy of eating meat sacrificed to idols. You need to be nervous about you and how you tend to justify idol worship in your mind and your thoughts and your heart and your actions and in your speech.

Remember when John the Baptist was in jail, right? And he sent his disciples to go ask Yeshua. Disciples approached Yeshua. Like, hey, Yeshua, John's in jail. And I know, like, he's been your cousin. And y'all grew up, like, that far away from each other, played together, did all this stuff, hung out. Like when he baptized you, like all that. I know you guys have been tight, but he just wants to know one more time, if you're the one, are you the king? Are you the one or should we look for another? He just wants to know. He's probably going to die. He wants to know.

The Blind Will See

And Yeshua, he quotes Isaiah, but he says this in Matthew chapter 11. You ready? Here's what he says. Jesus replied, go back and report to John what you hear and see. The blind... Now, Yeshua here is quoting primarily [Isaiah 35](#) and a little bit of [Isaiah 61](#), specifically proclaiming the good news to the poor. But look at the language he's using.

[Isaiah 35](#) is about the coming new creation where redemption comes to the cosmos. It comes to all of earth and all creatures. Redemption has come. The new heavens and earth are being poured out. Eyes will be opened. They will no longer be closed. Ears will be opened. Mouths will be opened. Legs will no longer be stone. They will start to walk again and leap and dance. And it says about these restored Israelites in Isaiah. A few chapters earlier in [Isaiah 32](#), it says, they will, it's like a climactic conclusion, they will see the glory of the Lord, which is what they were prevented from seeing because of their idolatry. They will see it. Their eyes will be opened.

So the impact here isn't simply the miracles that are happening. It's traced back to the prophets, but it's even bigger than that. It's a proclamation of the question that Isaiah asked, how long, how long? Yeshua is the one who has come to restore the organs of Israel so that they function again after being imprisoned for so long in the deception of idolatry. And not just Israel, the world.

And unlike the Isaiah proclamation of Israel not being able to see, Yeshua is the one that opens the eyes to the blind. And so we have a theme and we have a huge lesson of wisdom here. Huge message of the word of God to meditate on. Really cool connections too, right?

We Become What We Worship

But where's the action? Well, the action of what you do with what we have just read is up to you. It's up to you. If you have found yourself going blind spiritually, and it's getting harder and harder to hear the voice of the Lord, maybe your legs are stiffening up a little bit, maybe there's been an idol set up somewhere that you're giving your worship to. And it wasn't a big deal at first, but things are getting darker. Things are getting different.

You're starting to struggle more. No, you're starting to evolve or devolve into what you worship. And it would be easy if it was just a golden calf. But it can be anything from money, thievery, to lust, to power. It could be gossip, judging others, always keeping yourself on top. It could be pride, arrogance. It could be work and your career. It could be your self-image. It could be politics, even TV and music. I know that's always the go-to when you were in youth group, right? The idolatry of watching too much TV.

And what's so scary is as eye-rolling as some of those examples are, it can be something that you're willing to let fill the place that God is supposed to fill in your life. And what's so scary about it is most of the time you don't even realize it until you begin to get uncomfortable. And then it becomes a struggle. And you don't even realize that you're becoming more and more and more like what you worship, like what you really want, that foamy cup. And it could be a number of things.

Destroying the Idols in Your Life

But the encouragement of the word of God and what we read about this King Yeshua is that if you find yourself here today realizing that you have been turning more and more and more and more into something that you do not want to be, I have some great news for you. Our God does not leave us with condemnation, but with a hammer. Our God gives us the ability, if we so choose, to destroy the very idols that we have set up in our life. And that means has a name, and that name is Yeshua.

And so, maybe you have found yourself looking in the mirror, not recognizing the person. Maybe you've identified what the idol is. The good news is that that doesn't have to continue. The good news is that crying out in the name of Yeshua is grabbing the hammer and knocking it

down. The good news is you can have a life-changing moment today, right now, where you can cry out to the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, and you can be re-imaged to the life-giving power of the God that we serve.

So please stand as we conclude with worship. And this time is meant to be meaningful. You can worship, you can pray, you can meditate. We're going to have a prayer team on either side of the stage. Guys, when I say that you can have a life-changing event today, I mean it. I mean it. Cry out. And if you need prayer, we have prayer partners, prayer team that will pray with you. If you want to come up and symbolically place that idol on the altar to be destroyed spiritually, if you will, do it. Do whatever it takes today. But don't sit here and say, yeah, okay. I do have an idol in my life, and I want it out of my life, and I know I can destroy it any time that I want, but maybe I'll think about it and just do it tomorrow.

Do It Now

Guys, do it today. Do it now. It's time. You have struggled long enough. Avinu Malkinu, our Father, our King, we thank you for the opportunity to be reminded of the severity of what idol worship is and what it does and its effects. But we thank you for the grace and the mercy that you have revealed to us in the most accurate representation of who you are through Yeshua, that we also are called to have the authority and the power to destroy those very idols that we have put up in your place. We thank you, Father, for your power and for the Holy Spirit, the life-giving force that you've given to us. And may it work in and through us even now. In Yeshua's name we pray. Amen.

The Lord is our God, the Lord is one. Blessed is the name of his glorious kingdom for all eternity.

May the Lord Bless You

May the Lord cause you to increase and overflow in love for one another and for all people in order to strengthen your hearts as blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Yeshua with all of his kerosene. And may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance toward you and give you peace. Amen.

Shabbat Shalom, family.

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