

The Meaning of Life in the Perspective of Christian Theology and Existential Psychology: A Comparative Analysis of Rick Warren and Viktor E. Frankl

Jamson Siallagan^{1*}, Yuliono Evendi², Irene Nur Arta Purba Siboro³, Frans Aliadi², Daulat Marulitua Tambunan⁴, Palima S. Sianipar⁴

¹ Bina Nusantara University, Indonesia

² STT Khatulistiwa Sintang, Indonesia

³ SMAK Menara Tirza Gading Serpong, Indonesia

⁴ STT Rahmat Emmanuel, Indonesia

 siallaganj@binus.ac.id*

ABSTRACT

The meaning of life is one of the fundamental questions of human existence that is increasingly relevant amid the identity and life purpose crisis of the modern generation. This study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the thoughts of Rick Warren, a contemporary Christian theologian through his work *The Purpose Driven Life*, and Viktor E. Frankl, an existential psychiatrist with his logotherapy in *Man's Search for Meaning*. Using a qualitative method based on literature study and comparative-descriptive analysis, this study highlights the points of convergence and fundamental differences between the two figures. Warren emphasizes that the meaning of life is only found in relationship with God and divine purpose through five main callings: worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and mission. Meanwhile, Frankl asserts that the will to meaning is the primary motivation of humans, which can be realized through work, love, and attitudes toward unavoidable suffering. The findings show that although Warren is rooted in Christian theology and Frankl in existential psychology, both emphasize the dimension of transcendence, inner resilience, and personal responsibility as the core of a meaningful life. This study provides important contributions in the fields of theology, psychology, as well as the practice of education, spiritual ministry, and counseling, especially in responding to the crisis of life's meaning faced by modern society.

Keywords: Meaning of life, Christian theology, existential psychology, Rick Warren, Viktor E. Frankl

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INTRODUCTION

In modern society, increasingly lots individuals, in particular young generation who experience crisis meaning life. Development technology, globalization, and currents fast information has create a life full of everything instant however often shallow. In this situations, many young people feel lost direction, purpose, and depth life they. They tend preoccupied with achievement material, recognition social media in digital media, and pressure for success in a way external, but ignore dimension deep inner feelings, such as reflection self, spirituality, and values meaningfulness. This crisis reflected in increasing number stress, anxiety, even depression among young generation.

Meaning life is one of the question deepest and most fundamental in existence man. Since ancient times, humans Keep going ask: "For What I life?", "What is the purpose of me in this

world?", and "What life I means?" Two figures who are many give contribution to understanding about meaning life from two different approaches is Rick Warren, a pastor and writer book *The Purpose Driven Life*, which has been very influential in the contemporary Christian world, and Viktor E. Frankl, a psychiatrist at a time Holocaust survivor who developed approach Logotherapy in psychology existential. Both offer method a powerful and touching view for help man understand objective alive, but with framework different basis.

Rick Warren stated that meaning life only can found when somebody realize that his life no about himself alone, but rather about God and His will. According to Warren, life own objective eternal designed by God, and every man There is for fulfil calling divine On the other hand,(Rick Warren, 2002) Viktor Frankl, through experience traumatic experience in the camp Nazi concentration, realizing that even though in deepest suffering, human Still own freedom inner for choose How He respond fact life. In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl emphasizes that will for find meaning (will to meaning) is strength main in life man.(Viktor E. Frankl, 2006)

Previous studies have generally discussed Rick Warren and Viktor Frankl separately. Some studies on Rick Warren have focused on his contributions to church ministry, spiritual leadership, and the impact of his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, on the growth of congregational faith.(John C. Maxwell, 2018) Meanwhile, research on Viktor Frankl has focused heavily on the theory of logotherapy and its application in existential counseling, particularly in relation to the crisis of meaning, suffering, and individual psychological resilience.(Paul T. P. Wong, 2011) However, to date, no study has specifically compared the thoughts of Rick Warren and Viktor Frankl on the meaning of life in a single, comprehensive study. This research novelty is: it presents a dialogue between the perspectives of Christian theology and existential psychology in understanding the meaning of human life. A comparative study between the thoughts of Rick Warren and Viktor Frankl became interesting Because both of them, although originate from different disciplines, both emphasize importance meaning life in form direction, resistance inner, and spiritual well-being of humans. Comparison This No only give outlook about two approaches big in understand existence humans, but also opens up room more reflection wide in designing approaches new to crisis meaning life that Lots experienced by modern society, especially generation young. Therefore that, research This aim For review and compare Rick Warren and Viktor E. Frankl's thoughts on meaning live, highlight similarities, differences, and each person's contribution in form method view to existence man in a way more whole and deep. Through approach Christian theology and psychology existential, expected study This can become contribution scientific at a time practical in realm education, services spiritual, as well as counseling psychological.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition The Meaning of Life in General

In general way the meaning of life can be defined as the feeling that one's life has a meaningful purpose, value, and direction, thus encouraging individuals to survive, fight, and contribute to their lives.(Paul T. P. Wong, 2012) In philosophy, meaning life reviewed through question basic: What life man own meaning? Where does the meaning come from? That originate? Flow existentialism, which was pioneered philosopher such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, thought that meaning life is not something that has been determined or "given" by the outside world, but rather must created and discovered by the individual past freedom choose and be responsible answer on his actions. Sartre is famous with the expression: "Existence precedes essence," which means man more used to be "there" and new Then form its meaning himself.(Sartre, 2007) On the contrary, philosophers classic as Aristotle relates meaning life with draft eudaimonia, namely a "good and meaningful" life is achieved through development virtue and potential self.(Sartre, 2007)

Meaning life functioning as the compass that gives direction in life a person. An individual who finds meaning will more easy set purpose, make decision meaningful and directing energy as well as source power for realize vision his life. Michael Steger stated, "Awareness of meaning in life brings a sense of direction and resilience in response to life challenges."(Steger, 2012) Meaning life, someone can understand the 'why' behind his actions,

and become more stand face various pressure and difficulties. In a broader perspective, the meaning of life is also formed through a holistic and experiential process. It is not only constructed through abstract thinking or philosophical reflection, but also through everyday lived experiences. Sensory experiences (sensescapes), such as places, sounds, and familiar environments, can evoke emotional responses like nostalgia, comfort, and a sense of groundedness. These emotional experiences then contribute to cognitive meaning-making, where individuals interpret their lives in a more integrated way. In addition, social contexts—such as supportive relationships and a welcoming environment—play an important role in strengthening this process. Thus, meaning in life emerges as an integration of sensory experience, emotional depth, and social connection, even within simple yet significant moments of daily life.(Fan Chen, Xing Zhou, Yang Yang, 2026)

Extending this perspective into the domain of human activity and work, recent studies show that meaning can also be constructed through what is termed “meaningful venturing.” In this context, individuals—particularly entrepreneurs—actively create meaning through their actions and decisions in building and developing ventures. This process involves navigating trade-offs among purpose (a sense of direction), mattering (feeling that one’s actions are significant), and comprehension (understanding one’s experiences). Four main pathways emerge, shaped by intrinsic and extrinsic motivations as well as the level of knowledge individuals possess, each presenting distinct challenges. Thus, meaning does not arise automatically, but is consciously developed through action, reflection, and strategic engagement, ultimately shaping personal identity, enhancing well-being, and strengthening passion in one’s pursuits.(Stella Seyb, Dean A. Shepherd, 2025)

Having meaning life proven reduce risk depression and anxiety, increasing Power stand to stress and trauma, as well as strengthen the sense of hope life. Individuals who feel his life meaning also tends to own satisfaction life more high, attachment good social and motivation strong For give contribution to the environment and society.(Kashdan, Todd B., & McKnight, 2012) On the other hand, the absence of meaning can cause emptiness existential, disorientation, and problems psychological.(Yalom, 1980)

Meaning in life refers to an individual’s understanding of purpose, direction, and personal values that make life worth living. It supports clearer life orientation, strengthens coping with stress, and enhances psychological well-being and resilience.(John E. Joseph, 2022)

Accordingly, meaning in life serves as a crucial factor in promoting mental health, as individuals with a strong sense of meaning tend to be more resilient, hopeful, and better able to regulate emotions and cope with stress, whereas its absence increases vulnerability to psychological difficulties.(Crea, G., Francis, 2022)

Meaning of Life According to Christian Theology

In Christian theology, the primary purpose of human life is fundamentally formulated in the Westminster Shorter Catechism: “The chief end of man is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.”(Westminster Assembly, 1647) According to Calvin, humans were not created to seek meaning in life autonomously or based on personal desires, but to live in glory and fellowship with God. The meaning of life cannot be separated from the glory of God, because humans were created as *imago Dei* (the image of God) to reflect His character in the world (Genesis 1:26-28)(Calvin, 1960). The Bible states, “All things were created by Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16), and “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works...” (Ephesians 2:10)

The Christian life is based on God's calling (vocation). This calling applies not only to the context of the church or formal ministry, but also encompasses all of life: work, family, society, and culture. All areas of life are arenas of service to God.(Ryken, 1986) God is the center and source of all meaning, so that humans find their purpose in life only in knowledge of God and a renewed relationship through Christ. Herman Bavinck stated, "God and God alone is man's highest good. The knowledge of God is the soul's only true satisfaction(Bavinck, 1956)." God is sovereign over all aspects of life, so no area of life is "neutral" or separate from God's rule. All human life is under God's authority and purpose, and true meaning in life is possible only if humans live in submission to God's will(Piper, 2003). In Christ, humans receive a new identity and a new purpose. Christ is not only the savior from sin, but also the redeemer of life's

meaning, who reorients the entire orientation of human life toward God(Plantinga, 2002). Spirituality in the Christian tradition is not an escape from the world, but rather an active involvement in the world as part of obedience to God's call. Abraham Kuyper emphasized that in every inch of our lives, Christ is sovereign, and therefore, all human existence has meaning in the light of eternity. True spirituality is a life directed toward God in all things, whether worship, work, education, or social service(Kuyper, 1998). A meaningful life is a life that is centered on God, not on achievement, possessions, or personal comfort. This recognition and complete surrender of life to God is the essence of a God - centered life. All decisions, aspirations, and actions are carried out with the basis, "Does this glorify God?" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

In dialogue with contemporary perspectives, the Meaningful Venturing framework offers a complementary lens, even though it originates from psychological and entrepreneurial studies rather than explicitly from Christian theology. Its core dimensions—purpose, mattering, and comprehension—resonate closely with theological understandings of a God-given calling, the inherent worth of humans before God and others, and the belief that life unfolds within the scope of divine will. The framework emphasizes that meaning is not automatically possessed but actively constructed through intentional engagement, reflection, and decision-making processes shaped by motivation and knowledge. From a Christian standpoint, this can be understood as a conscious and faithful response to God's calling, where individuals live out their vocation through concrete actions. It also reflects the ongoing tension between personal desires and submission to God's will, while integrating identity, well-being, and passion with spiritual growth and service to others as expressions of a life that glorifies God.(Bencsik & Zsuzsanna Toth, 2025)

Further extending this discussion, contemporary studies indicate that meaning in life, even within culturally Christian-influenced contexts, is often understood in close relation to well-being and meaningful happiness. In this view, meaning emerges not merely from emotional satisfaction, but from the awareness that one's life is valuable, purposeful, and aligned with higher moral and communal values. This reflects an integration of spiritual, ethical, and psychological dimensions of human existence. Moreover, meaning is shaped by both internal and external factors, including life conditions, social relationships, health, and work environment. Empirical findings suggest that levels of perceived meaning and happiness in many contexts remain moderate to low, indicating that the realization of a meaningful life requires continuous and holistic development. Thus, meaning in life is not purely an individual or abstract theological concept, but is also socially and culturally constructed, calling for an integrative approach that unites faith, lived experience, and communal well-being.(Tyler L. Brown, John L. Oliffe, David Kealy, Simon M. Rice, Zac E. Seidler, 2023)

The Meaning of Life According to Psychology Existential

Existential psychology is a branch of psychology that developed from the philosophy of existentialism, with key figures such as Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus. This school highlights the central dilemmas of human existence: freedom, responsibility, uncertainty, alienation, death, and most importantly the search for meaning in a world that seems to have no inherent meaning(Dr Michael Swift n.d.). Unlike classical behaviorist or psychoanalytic approaches that tend to be reductionist, existential psychology views humans as conscious, free beings with the capacity to shape their own lives(Schneider, Kirk J., & May, 1995).

Existential psychology holds that the meaning of life is not automatic or given; rather, it must be created, discovered, and given meaning by the individual in the face of the reality of life, freedom, and unlimited choices(Roland Majla Positive n.d.). Jean-Paul Sartre famously coined the phrase "existence precedes essence," meaning that humans "exist" first and then shape who they are through personal decisions and responsibilities. Thus, the meaning of life becomes a personal project forged through freedom of choice, courage in facing the "absurd," and authenticity in action(Jean Paul Sartre, 1946). In Existential Psychotherapy, Yalom asserts that meaning is not passively discovered but rather created through individual action and

awareness. He also sees the loss of meaning as often at the root of many modern psychological disorders(Jean Paul Sartre, 1946).

Rollo May brought existential thought to the American context and developed a close connection between existential anxiety and freedom. In his book, *The Meaning of Anxiety*, he argued that anxiety is not something to be avoided, but rather part of human growth toward a more authentic consciousness(Rollo May, 1950). He argued that humans experience an existential crisis when confronted with the reality that life is full of uncertainty and demands free choice. However, this anxiety is constructive if it encourages a person to face life with courage(Rollo May, 1969).

Paul Tillich, a theologian who also influenced existential psychology, stated that humans live in "the state of being ultimately concerned," searching for something absolute as the center of their lives. In *The Courage to Be*, he explains that the courage to be arises when humans accept their limitations and still choose to live authentically(Paul Tillich, 1952).

From a contemporary psychological perspective, meaning in life can be further understood as an active meaning-making process, in which individuals interpret, organize, and integrate their life experiences into a coherent system of values, goals, and beliefs. This process becomes especially significant when individuals face difficult or painful experiences, as it allows them to reframe suffering and maintain a sense of purpose. In this context, meaning involves both the presence of meaning (a sense that life is meaningful) and the search for meaning (the effort to discover or deepen that sense). Together, these dimensions function as adaptive psychological resources that support coping, strengthen resilience, and enhance overall well-being, while also contributing to the reduction of depression and existential distress.(Song et al., 2025)

Building on this perspective, the process of meaning-making can also be understood as embodied and dynamic. Individuals often begin with an initial awareness or intuition of meaning, which is then deepened through what can be described as an "embodied awakening"—a process involving physical engagement, emotional experience, and interaction with one's environment. Through this lived engagement, individuals are prompted to reflect more deeply on their experiences and actively search for meaning, leading to a renewed understanding of themselves and their life direction. This ongoing interaction between body, emotion, and environment enables personal transformation, strengthens coping capacities, and fosters psychological growth. Thus, meaning in life is not static, but continuously constructed through cycles of experience, reflection, and renewed searching, ultimately contributing to greater well-being and existential maturity.(Stewart, 2026)

METHOD

This study use approach qualitative, namely purposeful approach For understand and interpret meaning from something phenomenon based on perspective characters, context, and experiences expressed in sources written. Qualitative methods chosen Because topic about meaning life nature conceptual, philosophical, and reflective, so that No can explained in a way quantitative or statistics. According to Moleong, research qualitative is effort For understand reality social in a way deep through interpretation of non- numerical data, such as words, symbols, meanings, and narratives figures(Lexy J. Moleong, 2018). With Thus, the method this is very relevant used in studies thoughts and reflections theoretical. Focus main study is understand and compare the thoughts of two figures, namely Rick Warren and Viktor E. Frankl, about meaning life. A qualitative approach is also considered appropriate for examining the meaning of life, as it enables researchers to explore the subjective and existential dimensions of human experience in depth. As explained by Michael F. Steger, meaning in life is a complex psychological construct that cannot be reduced merely to numerical representations; rather, it must be understood through individual narratives and lived experiences. This study underscores that a qualitative approach is essential for exploring how individuals construct and interpret the meaning of their lives.(Steger, 2017)

The analysis method used in this study is analysis comparative. A comparative approach in the study of meaning in life has also been employed in various studies to understand

differences in philosophical and psychological perspectives. For instance, research by Tatjana Schnell demonstrates that sources of meaning in life can vary significantly depending on individuals' value systems, cultural backgrounds, and personal beliefs.(Froh, J.J., Emmons, R.A., Card, 2011) This supports the importance of comparative analysis in understanding the perspectives of Rick Warren and Viktor Frankl. This method aim for identify similarities, differences, and contribution of each figure to understanding meaning life in context contemporary. Results of the this analysis expected capable give richer and more reflective understanding to draft meaning life from two angles different view, but each other complete.

Data were collected through a literature review approach, namely research conducted with examine various relevant literature with main problem. Approach This aim digging up data and information from source written, both primary and secondary secondary, as material analysis to the thoughts of two figures main thing studied. As explained by Mestika Zed, study literature is method scientific that relies on data and information from various document written, which then analyzed in a way critical For answer question research(Mestika Zed, 2008). The literature review as a data collection method is also supported by studies emphasizing the importance of textual analysis in philosophical and theological inquiry. According to Anat Shoshani and Pninit Russo-Netzer, exploring the meaning of life through literature-based analysis enables researchers to develop robust conceptual instruments grounded in theory and in-depth reflection.(Clarke & MacCann, 2016)

The emphasis on the use of primary and secondary sources in research on the meaning of life is also consistent with studies in existential psychology. Paul T. P. Wong argues that understanding the meaning of life requires an integration of classical texts and contemporary analyses in order to produce a comprehensive interpretation.(MacKenzie & Baumeister, 2014)

Primary data source in this study consists of from :

1.sources: Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?*; Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*; Viktor E. Frankl, *The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy* , 1969, Meridian Books.

2.Source secondary: Journal articles, books supporters, theses, and works scientific others who discuss about meaning life, psychology existential, and Christian theology. Literature secondary This used For enrich analysis as well as strengthen framework conceptual in compare second thinking figure.

In addition, research on the meaning of life often emphasizes the importance of deep philosophical reflection. In a study by Crystal L. Park, it is explained that meaning in life is closely related to individuals' belief systems and their processes of interpreting life experiences. Therefore, qualitative and comparative approaches in this study are highly relevant for capturing such complexity.(Garssen, B., Visser, A., & de Jager Meezenbroek, 2016)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Meaning of Life According to Rick Warren

Background on Rick Warren's Life

Rick Warren, born in 1954 in San Jose, California, is a Baptist minister. He earned a BA from California Baptist College, an M.Div. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a D.Min. from Fuller Theological Seminary. He is known as a Christian theologian who adheres to the five Solas of the Reformation and monergistic theology – that God works entirely alone in salvation and emphasizes the doctrines of predestination and concurrence, namely God's involvement in every aspect of human life(Anon n.d.-a).

Among his works, two books stand out as particularly influential. The first, *The Purpose Driven Church* (1995), emphasizes five purposes of the church based on the Great Commandment and the Great Commission: worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and mission. Warren emphasized that healthy church growth occurs when the purposes are balanced, not simply through growth strategies. The second, *The Purpose Driven Life* (2002), one of the best-selling Christian books of all time, is a 40-day personal study. Its first chapter begins with the famous line: "It's not about you." Warren encourages readers to discover purpose in life based on the understanding that humans were designed by and for God. Warren

stated that the “40 Days of Purpose in Life” approach is not theologically neutral. He firmly adheres to the five Solas, the doctrine of predestination, and concurrence, that every detail of life, including human choices, is under God’s control.

Rick Warren founded Saddleback Church in 1980 in Lake Forest, California, with just his wife and one other family member. Today, it is one of the largest megachurches in the United States, with over 20,000 weekly attendees and dozens of satellite locations in various cities. He built the church from the ground up with a purpose-driven approach, fostering a strong community-based church, contextual ministry, and healthy growth without sacrificing biblical doctrine(Anon n.d.-b).

The Meaning of Life According to Rick Warren

Rick Warren, in his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, asserts that “a meaningful life is a life driven by purpose.” From the very first page, he immediately challenges the common view of the meaning of life with the famous opening line, “It’s not about you. The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness(Rick Warren, 2002).” According to Warren, the meaning of life is not found by focusing on oneself, but by looking to God, who created us. A purpose-driven life means that all our decisions, motivations, and direction are determined by God’s plan, not by personal ambition or environmental pressures. He writes, “Knowing your purpose gives meaning to your life. We were made to have meaning. This is why people try dubious methods, like astrology or psychics, to discover it. Without God, life has no purpose, and without purpose, life has no meaning(Rick Warren, 2002).” This view of Rick Warren is consistent with findings in positive psychology, which emphasize the importance of life purpose as a source of meaning. William Damon argues that a sense of purpose provides a stable direction and serves as a fundamental foundation for individuals in constructing a meaningful life.(Garrett, M.T. and Barret, 2003) Thus, a purpose-centered life is not only theological in nature but also has an empirical basis within scientific inquiry.

Warren describes a person without a purpose as being like a ship without a rudder, easily swept away by trends, social pressures, guilt, or past bitterness. In contrast, a life guided by a divine purpose has a clear direction, motivates us to persevere through difficult times, and creates focus so we don't waste time on unimportant things. For Warren, this purpose is formulated in five primary callings: worshipping God (worship), building fellowship (fellowship), becoming like Christ (discipleship), serving others (ministry), and sharing the message of salvation (mission)(Rick Warren, 2002). By living a life driven by this purpose, a person will experience the deepest satisfaction, because their life is aligned with their creative purpose. Warren asserts, "The purpose of your life is not about you; it's about God's plan for you(Rick Warren, 2002)," a reminder that true meaning is not measured by personal achievement, but by the extent to which our lives are part of God's larger work.

Five Divine Purposes that Drive Life. Rick Warren asserts that a meaningful life is one lived according to God's design. In his book, he argues that God created humans to live driven by five primary purposes. These purposes are not simply a list of spiritual obligations, but rather the core of a life's calling, providing true meaning and direction.

Worship – Pleasing God with all your life. Warren emphasized that worship is not just a church activity, but a lifestyle that glorifies God in all aspects of life. He wrote, "Bringing pleasure to God is called worship. Anything you do that brings pleasure to God is an act of worship(Rick Warren, 2002)." Worship means surrendering our entire lives – thoughts, words, and deeds—as an offering that pleases Him. True worship is holistic, encompassing work, relationships, and daily decisions lived for the glory of God.

Worship provides a life orientation that goes beyond material achievement or social status and brings joy that is not dependent on circumstances, because true happiness arises when we know that our lives are pleasing to the Creator.

Fellowship – Being part of God's family. Warren emphasized that every believer is called to be a member of God's family through relationships with other believers. "You were formed for God's family(Rick Warren, 2002)." In fellowship, we learn to love, support, strengthen, and forgive one another. Fellowship is not just a social gathering, but a spiritual community that

binds us in Christ's love, enables us to grow, and provides us with a place to serve one another. Fellowship gives us identity and a sense of belonging. We find meaning when we are part of relationships that support and build us up. True happiness often comes from loving relationships, where we feel accepted as we are and can share our joys and sorrows with others.

Discipleship – Becoming more like Christ. The third goal is the process of becoming like Christ through character development and spiritual growth. Warren wrote, “God's ultimate goal for your life on earth is not comfort, but character development. He wants you to grow up spiritually and become like Christ(Rick Warren, 2002).” For Warren, becoming like Christ does not mean becoming God or taking on His divine attributes, but rather reflecting His character, such as love, humility, patience, truth, and faithfulness. This process does not happen instantly, but rather lasts a lifetime, starting from the moment a person believes in Christ until the end of their life. God shapes our character through various means: the Word of God as a guide for life, the work of the Holy Spirit who transforms hearts, and various life experiences, both happy and sad, which serve as means of spiritual learning.

Warren also emphasized that the essence of Christlikeness is love. Love becomes the primary driver of every action, motivation, and decision, so that life is no longer centered on self-interest, but rather on the interests of God and others. In the context of the meaning of life, this provides clear direction and purpose, preventing one from living an empty life or focusing solely on temporary material gains. Christlikeness gives eternal value to every aspect of life, because everything is directed toward glorifying God.

Furthermore, Warren believes that true happiness does not come from worldly comfort or success, but from living in harmony with God's purpose. The process of becoming like Christ brings profound joy, as one sees themselves growing into a loving, patient person who positively impacts others. Thus, becoming more like Christ is not only a spiritual goal but also a path to experiencing true meaning and happiness in life.

Ministry – Using gifts to help others. Warren reminds us that God gives each person unique spiritual gifts, abilities, and experiences to use in service. “You were shaped to serve God(Rick Warren, 2002).” Service is a tangible manifestation of love at work, where we use what God gives us to help others and build the body of Christ. The principle is clear: we are given to give, not just to meet personal needs. Service makes us realize that life is not just about ourselves. In addition, various studies indicate that a life oriented toward service and purposes greater than oneself is associated with higher levels of well-being. A study conducted by Anthony L. Burrow found that individuals with a clear sense of purpose tend to exhibit better psychological health and greater resilience in facing life's challenges.(Chan & Mendelsohn, 2010) This suggests that the concept of a purpose-centered life, as proposed by Rick Warren, also holds relevance within the context of modern psychology. The meaning of life becomes more apparent when we see the tangible impact of our contributions on the lives of others. Warren emphasizes that service is a form of joy born of love put into action.

Modern psychological research also proves that giving and helping others increases happiness. Cross-cultural research shows that altruistic behavior increases happiness. A study by Weiss-Sidi and Riemer in *Frontiers in Psychology* (2023) concluded that altruistic acts, such as giving or helping others, consistently increase happiness levels, especially in individuals from individualistic cultures(Rick Warren, 2002).

Mission – Sharing the good news of salvation with the world. Warren emphasized that every believer is sent to be a witness for Christ. “You were made for a mission(Rick Warren, 2002).” Mission is not just the duty of professional missionaries, but rather a calling for all Christians to bring the Gospel to those around them and to the world. Through mission, our lives become a means for others to discover true purpose in Christ. Mission gives a sense of urgency and purpose to life. We are not simply “living for today,” but playing a role in God's eternal plan that touches many lives. Deep joy is born when we know that our lives are being used by God to transform the lives of others and bring them to salvation. Furthermore, a life directed toward purposes that transcend the self has been shown to provide deeper meaning. Research indicates that individuals who focus on meaning (a meaning-oriented life), rather than merely on happiness, tend to experience more enduring life satisfaction.(Richard P. Bagozzi,

2012) This reinforces the view of Rick Warren that a life centered on divine purpose yields a deeper sense of meaning than the pursuit of personal achievement alone.

A purpose-driven life means that all our activities, decisions, and priorities are aligned with these five goals. Warren wrote, "Living with purpose is the only way to truly live. Everything else is just existing(Rick Warren, 2002)." By centering our lives on divine purpose, we will have lasting meaning, clear direction, and a lasting legacy.

The Meaning of Life According to Viktor E. Frankl

Background The Life of Viktor E Frankl

Viktor Emil Frankl (1905–1997) was a psychiatrist and neurologist from Vienna, Austria, widely recognized as the founder of logotherapy, a psychotherapeutic approach that emphasizes the search for meaning in life as a primary human motivation. His life was profoundly influenced by the tragic events of the mid-20th century, particularly his experiences as a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II. In 1942, Frankl, along with his wife, parents, and brother, was deported by the Nazi regime to Theresienstadt concentration camp, and then to Auschwitz, Kaufering, and Dachau(Viktor E. Frankl, 2006). During his three years of imprisonment, almost his entire family perished: his wife, father, mother, and brother never returned(Viktor E. Frankl, 2006).

Amidst extreme suffering, hunger, violence, and the constant threat of death, Frankl witnessed two types of human responses: those who succumb to despair, and those who persevere, holding on to the meaning of life. He realized that humans can survive even the most dire conditions if they have a "why" – a reason for living. This view was reinforced by a famous quote he borrowed from Friedrich Nietzsche: "He who has a why to live can bear almost any how(Viktor E. Frankl, 2006)." This experience formed the core of his thinking: meaning in life can be found even amidst the darkest suffering. For him, suffering was not something to be avoided at all costs, but could be a source of inner transformation if faced with the right attitude(Viktor E. Frankl, 2006).

Before the war, Frankl had already developed the initial ideas of logotherapy, but his experiences in the concentration camps both tested and strengthened these concepts(Lukas, E., & Hirsch, 2002). Logotherapy, derived from the Greek word logos (meaning), assumes that the primary human motivation is the search for meaning in life, not simply the pursuit of pleasure (as in Freud) or power (as in Adler). Logotherapy views existential crises, existential vacuums, and depression as symptoms of a loss of orientation in life. By helping individuals find personal meaning, logotherapy fosters psychological resilience and deeper happiness (Daniel Devoe, 2012).

After his release in 1945, Frankl returned to Vienna and, within nine days, wrote his famous book, *Ein Psycholog erlebt das Konzentrationslager* (A Psychologist Experiences a Concentration Camp), which was later translated into English as *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946). This book, combining personal testimony with scientific explanations of logotherapy, became one of the most influential works of psychology of the 20th century. It served not only as a historical document but also as a source of inspiration for many people facing suffering. Frankl asserted that the ultimate human freedom is the freedom to choose one's attitude in any given situation. This principle makes logotherapy relevant to a wide range of fields, from counseling to education to leadership(Viktor E. Frankl, 2006).

Recent empirical applications of Frankl's thought further demonstrate the relevance of logotherapy as an intervention in relational contexts, particularly in marriage. Core concepts such as the will to meaning, existential freedom of choice, and self-reflection are employed to reshape individuals' perspectives toward their relationships. Empirical findings indicate that individuals who undergo logotherapeutic processes experience significant improvements in marital satisfaction, suggesting that meaning-centered interventions are effective in enhancing relational quality and fostering deeper interpersonal understanding.(Hamidi et al., 2013)

The Meaning of Life According to Victor E. Frankl.

Will To Meaning. Frankl asserted that the most basic human drive is not primarily the "will to pleasure" or the "will to power," but rather the will to meaning – the desire to find and realize unique meaning in every life situation. He called logotherapy an approach that helps

people “reorient themselves toward the meaning of their lives,” because humans are “fundamentally capable of making sense of life under any, even the most miserable, conditions” (the postulate of “tragic optimism”)(Viktor E. Frankl, 2014)

In the theoretical section of *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl wrote that logotherapy focuses on the meaning of existence and on the human capacity to “creatively transform the negative aspects of life into something positive,” so that the therapist’s task is not to “give” meaning, but rather to enable the patient to discover it for themselves(Daniel Devoe, 2012).

This key idea has been widely confirmed and developed in recent scholarly research, for example, systematic reviews of the foundations and applications of logotherapy in the medical/psychological literature and the development of instruments for measuring “purpose in life(S. Rahgozar & rekan, 2020).”

A spiritual view without reference to a particular religion. Frankl used the term *noölogical/noetic* to name the spiritual dimension of humankind that is not identical to formal religiosity. *Noetic* means that the human person possesses a depth of values, conscience, and freedom that transcends the biological-psychological realm. Therefore, logotherapy distinguishes spirituality (as a human dimension) from specific religious institutions, while recognizing that for some people spirituality can include a relationship with the Divine(J. García-Alandete, 2023).

The spiritual dimension, according to Frankl, must be understood as broadly as possible, not primarily in a religious sense, but as a dimension that allows humans to transcend their environment and bear meaning(Filova, 2024).

The meaning of life as a basic human need. For Frankl, the need for meaning is constitutive: when the will to meaning is frustrated, an existential vacuum and symptoms of “*noogenic neurosis*” emerge – not primarily due to instinctual conflict, but rather to the absence of a purpose worth living for(Schimmoeller EM, 2021). Research in the psychology of meaning since Crumbaugh & Maholick developed the Purpose in Life Test has found that a sense of meaning is negatively related to depression, anxiety, and stress, and positively related to subjective well-being—confirming Frankl's thesis that humans are “healthy” when their meaning orientation is clear(Thir & Batthyány, 2016). In other words, the will to meaning functions as a psycho-existential “compass” that maintains inner integrity.

Three ways to find the meaning of life. Frankl formulated three paths to finding meaning: through work/achievement, love and the experience of value, and an attitude toward inevitable suffering(Viktor E. Frankl, 2006). Through work or achievement, we are pushed beyond our self-centeredness to something greater than ourselves. In logotherapy, this creative act also affirms personal dignity, because work is the answer to the question, “What does life expect of me now?” Logotherapy emphasizes the search for meaning through our contributions to the world with creativity, attitudes, and valuable actions. This is called creative action, one of the three main paths to finding meaning in life. In short, meaning provides “a reason why we wake up every day,” and it builds mental resilience and satisfaction with life(Viktor E. Frankl, 2006).

Through love and relationships. Frankl wrote succinctly but poignantly, “Love is the only way to reach the deepest core of another person’s personality.” Love enables us to see the deepest potential in those we love and, therefore, calls us to become more responsible versions of ourselves. Through meaningful attachments, close relationships are a primary source of meaning and hope(Viktor E. Frankl, 2006).

Through how we face suffering. When work and relationships are restricted, attitude becomes an arena of freedom. This is where “meaning as response” appears most pure. He said, “Happiness cannot be pursued; it must ensue... as a side effect of devotion to a purpose greater than oneself (Viktor E. Frankl, 2006).” Thus, happiness is not a direct goal, but rather the fruit of a meaningful life. Frankl also called it the paradox of self-transcendence: self-actualization occurs as a side effect of transcending the self(Viktor E. Frankl, 2006). According to him, the meaning of life is not given instantly from outside of humans, but must be discovered and created within the individual. Frankl emphasized that the meaning of life is personal and unique; each person has a responsibility to find its meaning, even in the midst of suffering. The

meaning of life cannot be imposed by external factors such as social status, wealth, or power, but rather arises from how one responds to one's life circumstances (Viktor E. Frankl, 2006).

Humans can still find meaning in life through the inner freedom to choose their attitude. Thus, the meaning of life is the result of personal awareness, choice, and responsibility, not merely the result of external conditions that befall a person.

Frankl did not intend to glorify suffering, but rather to affirm the possibility of meaning through its inevitability. In *Man's Search for Meaning*, he wrote that meaning is available even through suffering when it is unavoidable. However, when it can be avoided, meaningful action is to eliminate it (Viktor E. Frankl, 2006). This principle is based on his experience in a concentration camp, which found that when everything can be taken away, there remains "the ultimate human freedom to choose one's attitude under any circumstances (Viktor E. Frankl, 2006)."

This classic statement marks the thesis of inner freedom, that humans are not merely products of conditions but subjects who can determine the meaning of their attitudes.

The inner freedom Frankl expressed was always balanced by responsibility. Therefore, he aphoristically stated, "Freedom is only half the story; the other half is responsibility," and even proposed that a Statue of Responsibility be erected on the West Coast to complement the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast (Viktor E. Frankl, 2006).

This is the essence of logotherapy ethics: life questions us; our answer is responsible action. In Frankl's often-quoted formulation: "Ultimately, man should not ask what his life means, but recognize that it is he who is asked by life," and therefore the answer is given "by taking responsibility for his own life (Viktor E. Frankl, 2006)."

Complementing Frankl's framework, contemporary psychological studies conceptualize meaning in life as a multidimensional construct encompassing purpose, comprehension, and mattering—representing motivational, cognitive, and emotional-spiritual aspects of human existence. These dimensions resonate with Frankl's insight that meaning is not only thought about but lived and experienced. Furthermore, drawing on Frankl's three pathways—creative, experiential, and attitudinal—research shows that even from an early age, individuals, including children, are capable of constructing meaning through their actions, relationships, and responses to life situations. This reinforces the universality of meaning-making as a lifelong process that contributes to psychological well-being, identity formation, and resilience across different stages of human development. (Shoshani & Russo-Netzer, 2017)

Building on this perspective, logotherapy can be understood as a practical approach that helps individuals rediscover purpose, affirm personal values, and develop meaningful attitudes, even in difficult situations. Recent studies also indicate that burnout is often linked not only to external stress but to a loss of meaning and value misalignment. Therefore, restoring meaning through self-reflection and realignment with personal values becomes essential for achieving a more balanced and meaningful life. (Ulrichová, 2012)

Recent developments further demonstrate the application of logotherapy in innovative contexts, such as meaning-oriented music therapy. This approach integrates Frankl's three pathways—creative, experiential, and attitudinal—into therapeutic practice, showing that music can serve as an effective medium for expressing and actualizing meaning, particularly in clinical settings like palliative care. These findings reinforce that the pursuit of meaning is closely linked to mental health, resilience, and the human capacity to face suffering with hope and purpose. (Pfeifer, 2021)

Extending these implications into the field of education, the pedagogy of meaning of life emphasizes not only knowledge acquisition but also the formation of individuals who are aware of purpose and responsibility. Rooted in Frankl's perspective, this approach encourages self-awareness, freedom of choice, and self-transcendence through reflection and dialogue, enabling learners to live authentically and contribute meaningfully to others and society. (Santos, 2025)

Comparative Analysis Rick Warren and Viktor E. Frankl's thoughts on The Meaning of Life
Differences and Similarities

Rick Warren and Viktor E. Frankl's thoughts on meaning of life show existence similarities in direction, but leave from different foundations. Both reject the view that meaning of life can be found with self-centeredness alone, and together confirm that meaning of life demands man to go beyond himself. For Warren, this is confirmed since beginning his book *The Purpose Driven Life* with the famous phrase, "It's not about you," which means that meaning of life is not found with a turn around to oneself, but rather with a look at to Allah who created and designed life for humans. In a similar way, Frankl also emphasized the concept of self-transcendence, namely that man finds meaning of life precisely when he directs himself out from self-interest alone, good through valuable work, through love that binds him in relation deep with other people, as well as through the attitude taken when facing unbearable suffering inevitable. Thus, both Warren and Frankl saw that meaning of life is not nature-egocentric, but rather demands man to relate with something more big than himself.

Another apparent similarity clear is that meaning of life, according to both of them, gives direction and resistance in facing difficulties. Rick Warren describes that life that is not one's own objective like a boat without steering, easily carried away by current trends, guilt, or pressure environment, whereas life based on objective divine gives focus, determination, and strength to endure in difficult times. Frankl, with experience tragically in the Nazi concentration camps, witnessing similar reality: people who have reason for life can endure facing immense suffering usually, as reflected in frequently quoted quotes he repeats, borrowed from Nietzsche, "He who has a why to live can bear almost any how." Both of them emphasize that meaning is not just a draft abstract, but a strength concrete existential, which enables man to face challenges of life with power more resistant to big.

In addition, both Warren and Frankl were equally emphasize roles not quite enough to answer personally in finding meaning. Warren teaches that every believer called to carry out five divine purposes, namely worship, fellowship, discipleship, service, and mission. Everyone is required to take commitment seriously to carry it out. Frankl, on the other hand, emphasized that freedom man always balanced by responsibility to answer. For him, freedom without not quite enough answer is half story, because in the end life demands man to answer questions with his actions. With however, although from tradition different, both agreed that meaning of life is not something given in a way automatically, but rather must be lived through awareness, choice, and commitment personally.

However, behind equations that there is difference in fundamentals that make Warren and Frankl's thinking run along two different paths. Rick Warren departs from basic Reformed Christian theology. He emphasizes that meaning of life is sourced from the sovereign God, who has set objectives for every His creation. Within the framework theological this, meaning of life cannot be released from God's eternal plan, and man only can find it when he lives in harmony with Meaning The creator. Instead, Viktor Frankl departed from background behind psychology existential and experiential traumatic experience in the concentration camps. He emphasizes freedom inner man to find meaning, even without must referring to certain religious traditions. Frankl did confess the spiritual dimension of human beings, but he understood it in a broad sense, not identical with formal religiosity. Therefore, logotherapy can be worn by anyone, regardless from belief in his religion.

Another difference is seen in the source of the meaning offered. Warren emphasized that without God life has no own purpose, and only with living calling divine man will find meaning true. Frankl, on the other hand, teaches that meaning can be found through experience unique existential for every person, namely through work creative, relationship love and attitude facing suffering. Thus, if Warren submits approach normative sourced from revelation of God, then Frankl emphasized approach phenomenological-therapeutic departure from experience man.

From a contemporary psychological perspective, it is also important to distinguish between belief in the meaning of life (BMOL) and experienced meaning in life (MIL) as two empirically different dimensions. BMOL tends to be closely related to religiosity and spirituality, including belief in God and engagement in religious practices—an aspect that resonates strongly with Warren's theological framework. In contrast, MIL is more strongly

associated with psychological well-being, such as life satisfaction, positive emotions, vitality, and a sense of meaningfulness in everyday life, which aligns more closely with Frankl's existential-therapeutic approach. Empirical studies and factor analyses confirm that these two constructs are distinct, and that individuals may experience a meaningful life even without fully endorsing a broader metaphysical or cosmic meaning. Thus, belief-based meaning reflects religious and philosophical commitments, while lived or experienced meaning plays a more direct role in shaping individual well-being and resilience.(Crescioni et al., 2016)

Orientation end from thinking both are different. Warren directed human participation in God's eternal plan and glorifying Him, while Frankl focuses on wholeness existential and power stand psychological man in face life. For Warren, the meaning life nature theological and eschatological, directed to God and eternity. For Frankl, meaning life more nature existential and therapeutic, directed towards sustainability life man with integrity inner. Building on Frankl's perspective, the search for meaning remains a fundamental human drive in the modern world, expressed through both religious and secular pathways. Despite increasing secularization, religion continues to function as a stable source of meaning, resilience, and psychological support—particularly in the face of suffering—highlighting that the human need for meaning endures across contexts and cannot be replaced by technological or cultural shifts.(Kiralp, 2025)

In a study similar to the present research, conducted by Nito A. Sancheza, synthesis can be further enriched through a theological lens, particularly the concept of *hebel* in Ecclesiastes, often translated as “vapor,” which conveys the transience, fragility, and elusiveness of life rather than mere meaninglessness. In dialogue with Frankl's logotherapy, this perspective suggests that even within life's uncertainty, meaning can still be discovered through responsible living—by embracing human limitations, engaging in meaningful actions and relationships, and adopting constructive.(Sanchez & Dirgaprimawan, 2024)

Reflection Integrative.

Dialogue between theology and psychology in understand meaning life be one of effort important For bridge need spiritual and psychological human beings. Theology, especially in Christian tradition, understanding meaning life as something that originates from God. Human life is not A coincidence, but rather part from plan divine who has objective transcendent. In terms of This, Rick Warren emphasized that question fundamental about meaning life only can answered If somebody moreover formerly know God who created it. He write that life man find the goal No in himself alone, but in God who gives meaning since beginning creation(Warren, 2002).

Theology with thus look at meaning life as something that is theocentric, rooted in the love of God, and directed towards service as well as fulfillment plan eternity. On the other hand, psychology existentialism, pioneered by Viktor Frankl, understands meaning life as something that must be done discovered by humans Alone through experience concrete. Frankl departed from reality the suffering he endured experience in camp Nazi concentration, and concluded that even though condition external can rob almost everything, human still own freedom inner For choose his attitude(Viktor E. Frankl, 2006). Meaning live, in Frankl's framework, no given in a way automatically, but rather must searching for in three dimensions: through works and achievements, through experience love and relationships, and through chosen attitude when face suffering(Viktor E. Frankl, 2014). With thus, psychology existential emphasize freedom, responsibility responsibility and ability man For create meaning in the middle limitations. This is further supported by research in existential psychology, which emphasizes that the search for meaning in life is a dynamic process closely related to individuals' capacity to interpret their lived experiences. The meaning in life does not emerge instantaneously; rather, it is formed through individuals' engagement with the realities of life, including experiences of anxiety, freedom, and existential limitations.(Farber, B. A., Blanchard, M., & Love, 2019) In addition, research by Laura A. King shows that meaning in life is closely related to individuals' ability to integrate life experiences—both pleasurable and distressing—into a coherent and meaningful framework.(King et al., 2006)

The meaning of life is a fundamental human need that emerges through a dynamic process of experience, reflection, and personal search. It is not static but evolves through the interaction between the presence of meaning (a felt sense of purpose) and the search for meaning (the effort to find it), often shaped by existential experiences such as challenges, relationships, and suffering. Through deep reflection, individuals integrate these experiences into a coherent understanding of their values, purpose, and life direction, making meaning a consciously constructed and continuously evolving process.(Ma & He, 2026)

Dialogue between theology and psychology open room very valuable integration. Theology give ultimate direction, namely that meaning life culminating in God and purpose eternal that transcends this world, whereas psychology existential give emphasis practical on how man can find and live meaning it's in the middle reality everyday. In terms of others, theology Answer "where" and "where" meaning live, while psychology answer "how" meaning That can found. With integration this, we can see that meaning life nature transcendent at a time existential, grace at a time task, something that is accepted at a time fought for. Rick Warren's contribution to spiritual and community realms church No can released from his idea about purpose driven life. Through approach This, Warren succeeded move millions of believers For realize that life they own objective divine that is not just related with success worldly, but rather with participation in God's mission(Rick Warren, 1995). In the realm of community, the idea form pattern service more churches discipleship oriented, service social, and engagement active congregation. With Thus, his contribution lies in renewal Christian spirituality that connects faith personal with practice community. Meanwhile that, Viktor Frankl gave contribution significant in realm therapy and counseling existential. Through logotherapy, Frankl offers an approach that looks at man as creatures driven by will For meaning, not just will For pleasure or power(Viktor E. Frankl, 2011).

Logotherapy give a highly relevant framework for counselors, therapists, and pastoral care for help individuals who experience suffering, crisis ,or lost direction in live. With emphasize freedom inner and responsible answer existential, logotherapy open road for healing that is not only nature psychological, but also touching aspect deepest existence man.

The integration between Warren and Frankl shows that understanding meaning life No may stop only at a theoretical level, but must present in practice real. In service church, Warren's framework can enriched with understanding Frankl's existentialism so that teaching about objective life become more contextual and answer need psychological congregation. On the other hand, Frankl's logotherapy can given a transcendental horizon by Christian theology so that invention meaning life No stops at individual freedom, but rather leading to fulfillment relation with God. With method this, okay theology and psychology together confirm that meaning life is grace at a time not quite enough answer: something that comes from from God, but must discovered, chosen, and lived by humans in daily life.

CONCLUSION

Comparative study between the thoughts of Rick Warren and Viktor E. Frankl show that although originate from different disciplines, both confirm importance meaning life as center existence man and key resilience inner. From Rick Warren's perspective, the meaning life No can released from God as source and destination main existence human. Life becomes meaningful when somebody realize that He created No For himself alone , but rather For God's plan and calling. Warren formulated five goals divine –worship, fellowship, discipleship ,service ,and mission – as orientation life that gives direction eternal and satisfaction true. With thus, the meaning life according to Warren is theocentric, rooted in relationships with God, and nature eternal Because connected to the destination divine. In contrast, Viktor E. Frankl looked at it that meaning life sourced from will to meaning – encouragement existential man For find meaning unique in every situation life. Different with Warren emphasizing God's plan, Frankl emphasized freedom inner man For choose attitude, even in the most extreme suffering. He offer three road find meaning: through works, through love and relationships, and through attitude to suffering. With thus, the meaning life According to Frankl, it is personal, contextual, and found through courage existential For beyond self self (self-transcendence). Even though

different in foundation – Warren's is based on revelation and Christian faith, Frankl's is based on freedom existential – both agreed that without meaning, life lost direction, vulnerable to emptiness, and easy trapped in crisis psychological both physical and spiritual. Equality others, both Warren and Frankl, saw that meaning life No can determined only by factors external like success, wealth, or social status, but must found in more orientation tall than self himself: God (Warren) or values transcendence (Frankl). With Thus, the study This confirm that perspective Christian theology and psychology existential each other complement. Christian theology directs humans at the source the absolute meaning, namely God, while psychology existential give framework practical for individual For find and live meaning the through choices, relationships, work ,and attitudes in face suffering. In context modern society is plagued by crisis meaning, second approach This offer contribution important, Warren stressed spiritual and eternal dimensions, which help man go out from self - centered living going to a life centered on God, while Frankl emphasized dimensions freedom and responsibility personal answer, which helps man still find meaning even in situation suffering and absurdity. Therefore that, integration Warren and Frankl's thinking can give base complete reflection for young generation in face crisis meaning live. Warren emphasized direction eternal which is rooted in God, while Frankl emphasized freedom inner For interpret life with responsible attitude answer. Both of them together state that meaningful life is not a self - centered life, rather life beyond yourself and contribute for fellow as well as more reality tall.

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