THE QUESTION

What practices were most central to early Christian life?

Asked by a THF member on April 15, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 11 numbered quotations · the 25 early Christian passages and 114 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-practices-were-most-central-to-early-christian-life

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

The passages point to a few practices at the center: gathering every Sunday to hear Scripture and pray, sharing the Lord's Supper, praying faithfully together, caring for the poor, widows and orphans, and living holy lives of love toward God and neighbor. They do not rank these as a fixed top five.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

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POINT 1 OF 7

They met every Sunday to hear Scripture

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Justin describes the Sunday gathering. Believers from town and country met in one place, the writings of the apostles and prophets were read, and the leader urged everyone to imitate what they heard. Hearing and living out Scripture was a regular part of their week.

1

"On the day called Sunday, everyone who lives in cities or in the country gathers together in one place. The memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits."

later in the same passage

"Then, when the reader has finished, the leader verbally instructs and encourages the imitation of these good things."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Justin Martyr,** *First Apology* (c. 130–165 AD) **Source 8, page 7** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

They shared the Lord's Supper each Lord's Day

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The Didache tells believers to break bread and give thanks every Lord's Day, after confessing their sins. Anyone at odds with a fellow believer was to make peace first. Justin adds that after prayer, bread, wine and water were brought, blessed and shared with all.

2

"But on every Lord's Day, gather together, break bread, and give thanks after you have confessed your sins, so that your sacrifice may be pure."

later in the same passage

"But let no one who is in conflict with a fellow believer come together with you until they are reconciled, so that your sacrifice may not be defiled."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Didache,** *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 14 (c. 50–120 AD) **Source 1, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

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POINT 3 OF 7

They prayed together and attended faithfully

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Cyprian points to the first believers, who were of one heart and kept praying with one mind. The Apostolic Constitutions expect every Christian to come to church both morning and evening. Regular shared prayer is presented as normal, not optional.

3 “And so they prayed with prayers that were effective. In this way, they were able with confidence to obtain whatever they asked from the Lord's mercy.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 21, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

4 “Every Christian ought to attend the church faithfully, both morning and evening.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 23, page 8** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

They cared for widows, orphans and the needy

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Justin says the Sunday collection went to orphans, widows, the sick, prisoners and strangers. Cyprian recalls that the first believers sold property and shared with the poor. Caring for those in need was built into their worship and common life.

5 “Those who are well-off and willing give what they think is appropriate; the collection is deposited with the leader, who supports the orphans and widows, and those who, through illness or any other reason, are in need, as well as those who are imprisoned and the strangers living among us.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Justin Martyr,** *First Apology* (c. 130–165 AD) **Source 8, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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6 “Then they sold houses and farms, and gladly and generously brought the money to the apostles to be given out to the poor.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises* (c. 248–258 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 22, page 8 Read it in the library ›

POINT 5 OF 7

Good works filled their daily lives

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Hermas lists the good deeds a believer should never hold back from. They include faith, love and patience, and also hospitality, helping widows and orphans, and restoring those who fall into sin. He presents these as the way to walk and live to God.

7 “First of all there is faith, then fear of the Lord, love, concord, words of righteousness, truth, and patience. Nothing is better than these in the life of men.”

later in the same passage

“Then these follow with them: helping widows, looking after orphans and the needy, rescuing the servants of God from necessities, being hospitable—for in hospitality good-doing finds a field—never opposing anyone, being quiet, having fewer needs than all men, reverencing the aged, practicing righteousness, watching the brotherhood, bearing insolence, being long-suffering, encouraging those who are sick in soul, not casting those who have fallen into sin out of the faith, but turning them back and restoring them to peace of mind, admonishing sinners, not oppressing debtors and the needy, and if there are any other actions like these.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Hermas,** *Shepherd* (c. 90–150 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 4, page 6 Read it in the library ›

POINT 6 OF 7

They lived humbly and put Christ first

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Cyprian sums up God's will that Christ did and taught: humility, steady faith, mercy, peace with others, and loving God with the whole heart. Ignatius names faith, hope and love toward God and neighbor as the main points.

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8 “Now this is the will of God, which Christ both did and taught: humility in conduct; steadfastness in faith; modesty in words; justice in deeds; mercy in works; discipline in morals”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 20, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

9 “For the main points are faith in God, hope in Christ, the enjoyment of the good things we anticipate, and love towards God and our neighbor.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* (c. 98–117 AD) **Source 6, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

They prayed for those who opposed them

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Aristides tells the emperor that Christians bear persecution patiently. He says they pity their opponents and pray that they will repent. The Epistle to Diognetus likewise says Christians love those who hate them.

10 “And for the most part they have compassion on them, as people who are without knowledge. For their part, they offer prayers that these people may repent of their error.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Aristides,** *Apology* 17 (c. 125–140 AD) **Source 7, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

11 “The soul loves the flesh that hates it, and loves the members; Christians likewise love those that hate them.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Mathetes,** *Epistle to Diognetus* (c. 80–200 AD) **Source 3, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- No passage here gives an official list or ranks a top five; the grouping is our summary.
- The quoted passages say little about fasting, baptism or private prayer at home.

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- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 25 early Christian passages and 114 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–25, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 26–77, in Bible order), then 62 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF's updated English unless marked "1885 English" (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). "… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *25 passages from 18 writers*

Didache, *c. 50–120 AD · sources 1–2*

1 *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 14 (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 2** "every Lord's day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 8 (1885 English; on point 3) "fast on the fourth day and the Preparation (Friday… [continues online] **read ›**

Mathetes, *c. 80–200 AD · source 3*

3 *Epistle to Diognetus* **Quote 11, page 5** sum up everything in one word—what the soul is in the body, that Christians are in the world. The soul is spread throughout all the members of the body… [continues online] **read ›**

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · source 4*

4 *Shepherd* (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** "these, nothing is better in the life of men… [continues online] **read ›**

Papias, *c. 95–130 AD · source 5*

5 *Fragments* (1885 English; on point 6) "early Christians] called those who practised a godly guilelessness, children, [as is stated by Papias in the first book of the Lord's Expositions, and by Clemens Alexandrinus in his… [continues online] **read ›**

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · source 6*

6 *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* (1885 English) **Quote 9, page 5** "the chief points are faith towards God, hope towards Christ, the enjoyment of those good things for which we look, and love towards God and our neighbour… [continues online] **read ›**

Aristides, *c. 125–140 AD · source 7*

7 *Apology* 17 **Quote 10, page 5** "shameful acts with males, and with a mother and a sister and a daughter, in turn accuse the Christians of their monstrous impurity. But the Christians are righteous and good… [continues online] **read ›**

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Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · sources 8–9*

8 *First Apology* (1885 English) **Quotes 1, 5, pages 2, 3** "on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *First Apology* (1885 English; on point 3) "many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God… [continues online] **read ›**

Theophilus of Antioch, *c. 169–183 AD · source 10*

10 *To Autolycus* 15 (1885 English; on point 6) "with them temperance dwells, self-restraint is practiced, monogamy is observed, chastity is guarded, iniquity exterminated, sin extirpated, righteousness exercised, law administered, worship performed, God acknowledged: truth governs, grace guards… [continues online] **read ›**

Athenagoras, *c. 170–190 AD · sources 11–13*

11 *A Plea for the Christians* 11 (1885 English; on point 7) "then, are those teachings in which we are brought up… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *A Plea for the Christians* 33 (1885 English) "having the hope of eternal life, we despise the things of this life, even to the pleasures of the soul, each of us reckoning her his wife whom he has… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *A Plea for the Christians* 12 (1885 English; on point 6) "certainly not. But, because we are persuaded that we shall give an account of everything in the present life to God, who made us and the world, we adopt a… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · source 14*

14 *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus* (1885 English) "this custom took its rise from apostolic times, as the blessed Irenæus, the martyr and bishop of Lyons, declares in his treatise On Easter, in which he makes mention of… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 15–16*

15 *Stromata* 7.3 (1885 English; on point 3) "especially having uninterrupted converse and fellowship with the Lord… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Instructor* 1.13 (1885 English; on point 5) "the life of Christians, in which we are now trained, is a system of reasonable actions — that is, of those things taught by the Word — an unfailing energy which we… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · source 17*

17 *De Spectaculis (On the Shows)* 1 (1885 English) "are some who imagine that Christians, a sort of people ever ready to die, are trained into the abstinence they practise, with no other object than that of making it… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · source 18*

18 *Against Celsus* 27 (1885 English) "a truth, such evil practices do not at all prevail among Christians, if you properly examine what constitutes a Christian… [continues online] **read ›**

Dionysius of Alexandria, *c. 232–265 AD · source 19*

19 *Miscellaneous Fragments* "sent me this question, most faithful and accomplished son, to ask what the proper hour is for ending the fast on the day of Pentecost. You say that some of… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 20–22*

20 *Treatises* (1885 English) **Quote 8, page 5** "in conversation; steadfastness in faith; modesty in words… [continues online] **read ›**

21 *Treatises* (1885 English) **Quote 3, page 3** "This unanimity formerly prevailed among the apostles; and thus the new assembly of believers, keeping the Lord's commandments, maintained its charity… [continues online] **read ›**

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22 *Treatises* (1885 English) **Quote 6, page 4** “Let us consider, beloved brethren, what the congregation of believers did in the time of the apostles, when at the first beginnings the mind flourished with greater virtues, when the… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · source 23*

23 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** “Every Christian Ought to Frequent the Church Diligently Both Morning and Evening… [continues online] **read ›**

Lactantius, *c. 290–320 AD · source 24*

24 *Divine Institutes* 9 (1885 English; on point 6) “impiety, if taken up in that which is the most important, would follow through all the rest… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Rome · *source 25*

25 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (on point 6) “if we follow the way of truth, casting away from us all unrighteousness and iniquity, along with all covetousness, strife, evil practices, deceit, whispering, and evil-speaking, all hatred of… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *52 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

26 **1 Chronicles 23:30** and to stand in the morning to praise and give thanks to the Lord, and so in the evening; **read ›**

27 **2 Chronicles 8:13** as the duty of each day required, offering according to the commandments of Moses on the Sabbaths, at the new moons, and at the feasts, three times in the year: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles. **read ›**

28 **2 Chronicles 13:11** they burn whole burnt offerings to the Lord morning and evening, and compounded incense, and set out the loaves on the pure table, and there are the golden lampstand and its lamps for burning, to be lit in the evening; for we keep the charge of the Lord God of our fathers, but you have forsaken him. **read ›**

29 **Ezra 9:4** Then everyone who followed the word of the God of Israel gathered to me because of the faithlessness of the exiles; and I sat still in silence until the evening sacrifice. **read ›**

30 **Proverbs 12:11** He who works his own land will be filled with bread, but those who pursue vain things lack understanding. He who takes pleasure in lingering over wine will leave dishonor in his own strongholds. **read ›**

31 **Proverbs 14:19** The evil will fall before the good, and the ungodly will wait at the doors of the righteous. **read ›**

32 **Ecclesiastes 4:14** For he will come out of the house of the prisoners to reign, for even in his kingdom he became poor. **read ›**

33 **Ecclesiastes 6:9** Better is the sight of the eyes than wandering of the soul. This also is vanity and a choosing of the wind. **read ›**

34 **Song of Solomon 3:4** Scarcely had I passed from them when I found him whom my soul has loved. I held him and did not let him go, until I brought him into my mother’s house, and into the chamber of her who conceived me. **read ›**

35 **Song of Solomon 3:5** I have charged you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the powers and by the strengths of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases. **read ›**

36 **Isaiah 7:21** And it shall be in that day that a man shall rear a young cow and two sheep; **read ›**

37 **Isaiah 8:7** therefore, behold, the Lord brings up upon you the water of the river, strong and abundant, the king of the Assyrians and his glory; and he shall go up over every valley of yours, and walk over every wall of yours, **read ›**

38 **Isaiah 14:3** And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord will give you rest from your anguish and your anger, and from your hard slavery, in which you served them. **read ›**

39 **Isaiah 15:3** Wrap yourselves in sackcloth in her squares, and lament on her rooftops and in her lanes; all of you, wail with weeping. **read ›**

40 **1 Esdras 5:51** They kept the Feast of Tabernacles as it is commanded in the law, and offered sacrifices daily, as was fitting; **read ›**

41 **1 Esdras 9:4** and that whoever did not come within two or three days, according to the judgment of the ruling elders, should have his cattle given over to the temple, and he himself should be cut off from the multitude of the captivity. **read ›**

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42 **1 Esdras 9:38** And the whole multitude gathered together in the open square before the gate of the temple toward the east, **read ›**

43 **Tobit 12:8** Prayer is good with fasting and alms and righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than much with unrighteousness. It is better to give alms than to lay up gold. **read ›**

44 **Wisdom of Sirach 5:11** Be quick to listen, and give your answer with patience. **read ›**

45 **Wisdom of Sirach 9:15** And let your reasoning be with men of understanding, and all your talk in the law of the Most High. **read ›**

46 **1 Maccabees 12:11** We therefore remember you at all times without ceasing, at the feasts and on the other appointed days, at the sacrifices that we offer and in our prayers, as it is right and fitting to remember brothers. **read ›**

47 **1 Maccabees 14:19** And these were read before the assembly in Jerusalem. **read ›**

48 **2 Maccabees 4:14** that the priests were no longer eager for the services of the altar; but despising the temple and neglecting the sacrifices, they hurried to take part in the lawless exhibitions in the wrestling arena after the signal for the discus-throwing. **read ›**

49 **2 Maccabees 6:9** and that they should slaughter those who would not choose to change over to Greek ways. So one could see the misery that had come. **read ›**

50 **2 Maccabees 8:28** After the Sabbath they gave some of the spoils to those who had been tortured and to the widows and orphans, and the rest they divided among themselves and the children. **read ›**

51 **2 Maccabees 14:38** For in the former times of separation he had been brought to trial for Judaism, and he had risked body and soul for Judaism with all earnestness. **read ›**

52 **3 Maccabees 3:4** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

53 **3 Maccabees 3:5** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

54 **4 Maccabees 7:21** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

55 **4 Maccabees 8:7** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

56 **4 Maccabees 14:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

57 **4 Maccabees 15:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

58 **1 Enoch 37:5** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

59 **1 Enoch 92:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

60 **Acts 2:42** They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. **read ›**

61 **Acts 2:44** All who believed were together, and had all things in common. **read ›**

62 **Acts 2:46** Day by day they continued steadfastly with one accord in the temple, breaking bread at home and sharing food with gladness and simplicity of heart, **read ›**

63 **Acts 4:32** The multitude of those who believed were of one heart and soul. No one said that any of his possessions was his own, but they had all things in common. **read ›**

64 **Acts 5:42** Every day, in the temple and at home, they never stopped teaching and preaching the gospel of Jesus the Christ. **read ›**

65 **Acts 15:29** abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these things, you will do well. Farewell." **read ›**

66 **Acts 20:7** On the first day of the week, when the disciples were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and continued his speech until midnight. **read ›**

67 **Acts 21:25** But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written our decision that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from food offered to idols, from blood, from strangled things, and from sexual immorality." **read ›**

68 **1 Corinthians 7:17** Only, as God has apportioned to each, as the Lord has called each, so let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches. **read ›**

69 **2 Corinthians 1:12** For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you. **read ›**

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70 **Philippians 1:27** Only let your conduct as citizens be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand firm in one spirit, with one soul striving together for faithfulness to the gospel, **read ›**

71 **Philippians 3:20** For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, **read ›**

72 **Colossians 4:5** Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. **read ›**

73 **Colossians 4:6** Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one. **read ›**

74 **1 Peter 1:15** but just as he who called you is holy, you yourselves also be holy in all of your behavior, **read ›**

75 **1 Peter 2:12** Keep your conduct good among the nations, so that, where they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good works and glorify God in the day of visitation. **read ›**

76 **1 Peter 3:2** when they see your pure conduct in fear. **read ›**

77 **1 Peter 3:16** having a good conscience, so that, when they speak against you as evildoers, those who malign your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *62 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Psalms 50:16 · 50:18 · 133:1

Proverbs 19:17 · 31:8

Isaiah 1:18 · 58:6

Matthew 5:8 · 5:31 · 5:44 · 5:46 · 6:5 · 6:11 · 6:13 · 7:9 · 8:4 · 18:23 · 19:3 · 19:5 · 19:9 · 19:12 · 22:39 · 25:35

Mark 10:11

Luke 6:27 · 6:32 · 6:34 · 10:30 · 11:3 · 16:18

John 2:3 · 3:5 · 5:28 · 8:12 · 14:6 · 17:11

Acts 1:14 · 3:1 · 10:9

Romans 1:26 · 1:32 · 12:10 · 12:13

1 Corinthians 2:9 · 7:10 · 9:23 · 13:4 · 14:13 · 15:32

2 Corinthians 5:1 · 6:14

Ephesians 6:12

Philippians 3:15 · 4:18

1 Timothy 5:9 · 5:10

Hebrews 13:2

James 1:27 · 5:19

1 Peter 2:11

1 John 2:3

Revelation 3:21

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Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “What practices were most central to early Christian life?” on April 15, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

Library only. This study was written only from The Historic Faith’s library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed above, with a link to read it.

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How to cite this study. The Historic Faith, “What practices were most central to early Christian life?” Early Church Questions, published November 9, 2026, https://thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-practices-were-most-central-to-early-christian-life. To cite one quotation, add its number and source, for example “quote 1, source 8.”

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THE END OF THIS STUDY