

# BEYOND TODAY

The British & European Supplement

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## Peace will come . . .

*. . . Yet not in the manner that most in this deeply troubled world will expect – or accept.*

A sense of unease prevails across our world, country and neighbourhoods. Concern is rising that there may no longer be peaceful places in which to live. Talk of a third world war is becoming commonplace, with some suggesting it has already begun.

Often assumed to be merely the absence of war or conflict, true peace has a far deeper meaning than that, encompassing justice, respect, harmony and tranquillity.

Scripture proclaims of human beings in general: “the way of peace they have not known” (Romans 3:17). Most have a tendency to paper over the cracks of potential conflicts and proclaim: “Peace, peace!” when there is no peace” (Jeremiah 6:14).

### Hallmark of the godly

For Christ’s followers, however, peace should be a defining characteristic. In the “Sermon on the Mount” Christ declared, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9). The Messiah is called the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), and God the Father is known as the “God of peace” (Hebrews 13:20).

Biblically, mankind is able to experience peace if the following applies:

- God remains intrinsic to one’s life.
- Peace is sought within oneself and with others.

Living in a hostile environment – whether it be broken personal relationships within the home or family, or the growing absence of peace in wider society – impacts us all and can be highly stressful. What must come first, for everyone, is peace with God. This is the foundation of personal peace within ourselves, and with others.

As disciples of Christ, our responsibility is to pursue

that which leads to peace, being dependent upon God because His peace is a fruit of His Spirit, not merely an outcome of our own works or abilities (Galatians 5:22).

Christ promised His disciples, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you” (John 14:27). When the repentant are baptised they receive the Spirit of Christ and the Father through the laying on of hands by an elder of the Church Jesus established. Those called by Him are to let peace rule in their lives and relationships. This fruit of God’s Spirit is therefore evidence of our Heavenly Father working in individual lives. As the apostle Paul wrote: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

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This is the beginning of real peace and must come first.

### Personal and external woes

Jesus said we are not to fear those who disturb our peace: they cannot take God’s gift of eternal life from us, so long as we do not deny who Christ is. Disturbers of the peace may regard the lives of others to be of little worth, but to God human life has great value and importance (Matthew 10:28-31).

The writer of Hebrews advises: “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). However, Christ did explain that

he had come to bring a sword, because His true teachings would divide families and friends as they did when He walked the earth (Matthew 10:34-39). We must be careful to put God and His truth first in our lives, irrespective of whether upset may be caused due to a divergence of opinion.(verses 34-39).

Often we are not at peace because we worry; maybe we don't trust God, or don't believe that He will rescue us, or maybe Satan has disturbed our peace leading us to doubt God's love and care. From noisy and inconsiderate neighbours, to petty vandalism and worse – such actions rob citizens of personal peace, causing worry and distress.

Jesus commented that in this world it is likely His followers, and perhaps all people, will have trouble, but in Him there is true peace because He has overcome the world – and that is encouraging news (John 16:33).

What is promised when we come to God in prayer with thanksgiving is not necessarily deliverance from all disturbances to our peace, but that, “the peace of God... will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

That said, we might also keep in mind 1 Corinthians 10:12-13 which assures us that God will not allow us to be defeated by any sort of disturbances, on condition that we are doing our part.

### Prince of Peace

Colossians 3:15 contains this instruction: “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts”. Most other English Bible translations are similarly worded, but the Contemporary English Version states: “So let the peace that comes from Christ control your thoughts.” This is something we can learn to practise, whilst avoiding divisive behaviours like those listed in Galatians 5:19-21: “Now the works of

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the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told



Iconic image of a lion and its prey living in harmony, depicting true and lasting world peace under Jesus Christ's rulership.

InDesign

you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

True repentance not only brings peace with God but also potentially with those around us. The apostle Paul encourages disciples that, “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:18).

Christ's reign on earth will finally bring true and lasting peace. It won't start out that way though, as the nations of the world gather at Armageddon before heading towards Jerusalem to fight Him. To read more concerning this climactic battle between Jesus Christ and the satanically influenced armies of the world, please request or download our booklets *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*

Following the defeat of the forces of evil, the prophet Isaiah states of Messiah's rule: “Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgement and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 9:7). Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3 affirm that nations will refashion their weapons into farming equipment and no one will learn war any more. Other verses discuss how ferocious or dangerous animals will no longer be aggressive (Isaiah 11:6-9).

At that time, God will offer His Holy Spirit to all who are willing to obey Him (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Ezekiel 36:22-28). To study this coming time of peace and prosperity for all, please request or download our booklet *Christ's Reign on Earth: What It Will Be Like*.

David Fenney

# When will God intervene?

*People often ask: Why doesn't God intervene and put a stop to man's unjust rule? Some even believe that the Creator is hiding Himself, unwilling to rescue us from our plight. Can we know the answer?*

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**W**ith ever-increasing global conflicts, calamitous natural upheavals, a sharp decline in moral behaviour, the spread of international terrorism, greed and ineptitude in financial management, massive incompetence in government, dangerous religious confusion, how long can the world survive without help from on high?

Earth's greatest newscaster, Jesus Christ, had something supremely important to say about the general conditions that would prevail in our modern world at the time of the end. He puts us all on notice about the perilous circumstances in our troubled age. Compare His prophetic words to His disciples as recorded in the Olivet Prophecy to the list given above: "You will hear of wars and rumours of wars . . . for nation shall rise up against nation and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows . . . for then there shall be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24: 6-8, 21).

***Jesus Christ warns and reassures us that "unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:22).***

## **Inevitable intervention**

Jesus showed that mankind's errant behaviour would eventually bring humanity to the very brink of total destruction (Mark 13:19-20). Is man in the process of destroying himself? It certainly seems that way.

Thankfully, Jesus reassured His disciples that the Lord Almighty will ultimately intervene and not allow humanity to self-destruct. Referring to this unique period of time, Jesus Christ both warns and reassures us that "unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:22).

But why has God waited so long? The answer is that

He has allotted around 7,000 years to fully implement His overall plan of salvation – with the first 6,000 of these for man to prove his inability to rule himself without God's guidance.

Numerous empires and civilisations, from the ancient Egypt of the Pharaohs to modern days, have all been given an opportunity to develop a utopian type of government. All failed. Many past empires and kingdoms ruled without regard to God's approach or His instructions on creating a just society. Others have invoked the name of God in governing their people, but have not been willing to rule over others in the way He intended. When will enough be enough?

In describing God's plan for His human creation, the Bible uses the expression, "in the fullness of the times" (Ephesians 1:10). This biblical expression means that events in the world would be allowed to run their natural course, but God would intervene at just the right times to ensure that His purpose for the world be ultimately fulfilled.

## **God is sovereign**

So it's not a question of God hiding Himself or being oblivious to man's welfare. Quite the contrary. God has a step-by-step plan, revealing His overall aim to save mankind. One supremely important step is Christ's sacrifice, making possible the forgiveness of our sins. "When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law . . ." (Galatians 4:4). "Under the law" means to be under its penalty – the sentence for sin is death (Romans 6:23).

Other passages clearly show that Christ's sacrifice applies to all of mankind (John 3:16; 12:32). Yet even after this awesome event, God allowed man to continue to go his own way – rejecting the true way of life that God offers His creation. Throughout history mankind has consistently spurned the way of peace and of just government, creating his own methods of ruling others instead, often in a dictatorial and oppressive manner.

But it should come as no surprise that God has on many occasions intervened in human affairs during the



last 6,000 years. The Bible records pivotal divine interventions – Noah’s flood, the Tower of Babel, the call of Abraham, and the Exodus, to name but a few.

The ancient Babylonian monarch Nebuchadnezzar realised what all too many leaders today utterly fail to acknowledge: That God is watching world events very closely and He reserves the right to intervene in human affairs at any time of His choosing in order to fulfil His basic plan. Earlier in his life, as recorded in the fourth chapter of the book of Daniel, this Babylonian king had boasted of how he was solely responsible for creating the fabulous city of Babylon. For this arrogant statement his rule of the Babylonian empire was taken from him for seven years. Proverbs notes: “When pride comes, then comes shame” (Proverbs 11:2). Afterwards this ancient king acknowledged publicly “that the most High rules in the kingdoms of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses” (Daniel 4:32). King Nebuchadnezzar had finally learned that God rules supreme, overseeing the rise and fall of nations and the destiny of man. He declared, “And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven . . . and I blessed the Most High and praised and honoured Him who lives forever. For His dominion is an everlasting dominion” (verse 34).

When will God’s spectacular intervention in human affairs take place? It will occur in the Creator’s time. The resurrected Christ told His apostles: “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (Acts 1:7).

### Our part

What does God expect from those who have been called to real repentance now and given an understanding of His truth? Our Creator requires us to actively embrace His character as taught and modelled by Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:43-48; 22:36-40). We are also to be involved in helping to proclaim the true gospel of God’s coming kingdom to the world at large, proclaiming the good news of a new and just age.

Today very few modern leaders acknowledge God’s supremacy, and the whole world suffers the miserable consequences. We should all remember to pray: “Thy Kingdom come” – recalling what the Hebrew prophet Isaiah said: “Oh, that you would rend the heavens! That You should come down . . . That the nations may tremble at Your presence” (Isaiah 64:1, 3). God does not forget. What He has promised He will perform! For more information on this topic, please request or download *The Final Superpower*.

Gerhard Marx

## Food insecurity looms



Westminster December 2024: Farmers protest against perceived threats to their livelihoods .

Shutterstock

It has been almost two centuries since Britain was self-sufficient in food production. In 1984, food self-sufficiency in the United Kingdom reached a post-war high, where 78% of produce was home grown. Since then, that percentage has steadily declined.

With recent inheritance tax changes appearing to threaten some farming communities, and attempts to convert arable and pasture land to solar-panel and wind-turbine usage, and more recently for proposed new housing, food security in Britain is becoming an increasing concern for many.

In the Olivet Prophecy, Jesus Christ listed famine as one of the signs of upheaval at the end of the age (Matthew 24:7). The prophecy of famine reoccurs in Revelation 6:5-6, illustrated by a black horse, as one of the precursors to the Day of the Lord, when God will intervene in the affairs of humankind.

Until recently it was not clear how such a situation might arise in the world, but with the war in Ukraine – once the “breadbasket of Europe” – and now the growing farming uncertainties in the UK and elsewhere, the “how?” is perhaps coming into focus.

To study this important topic further, please request or download our booklets *The Horsemen of Revelation* and *Seven Prophetic Signs Before Jesus Returns*. You may also be interested in watching *A Biblical Worldview: Horsemen of Revelation – The Black Horse of Famine*. View online at [www.ucg.org/watch/beyond-today/beyond-today-daily/biblical-world-view-horsemen-revelation-black-horse-famine](http://www.ucg.org/watch/beyond-today/beyond-today-daily/biblical-world-view-horsemen-revelation-black-horse-famine).

# Pray with purpose

*Many do not know how or what to pray. They are in good company with Christ's disciples of the first century who sought instruction from Him.*

Consider how you would feel if a friend or relative came to you every day and recited the same words about his or her day and its various problems and issues. Would you expect such a relationship to develop and deepen, or would you tend to switch off and crave something new and refreshing? It might be even worse if everyone you met uttered the same form of words. While our heavenly Father has more patience than we do, He longs for us to engage in meaningful conversation with Him.

## Teach us to pray

Christ's disciples asked Him how to pray. They lived in a society where ritualistic, recited prayer was common, prayers on rising, prayers over food, prayers before retiring for the night. However, it was clear to them that Jesus did not address His Father in this way. Rather than give them prayers to recite, He provided them with a model or outline to use. Clearly, He wanted them to learn how to communicate purposefully in prayer – not simply to use His or someone else's words. The model He gave them is in both Luke 11 and Matthew 6. In Matthew's account, verses 5-8 and 14-15 amplify the model with a little more information than Luke gives.

Many simply repeat verses 9-13 as a rote prayer, the

***Rather than give His disciples prayers to recite, Jesus Christ provided them with a model or outline to use.***

so-called "Lord's Prayer." In so doing, they unwittingly disobey Jesus' instruction to avoid repetitive prayers ("vain repetitions," verse 7), encouraging us instead to learn to pray spontaneously.

## Expanding the outline

Looking at Jesus' model, the first point to note is that we should address God as our Father. More than guidance in "the right way to pray" this introduced the disciples to the concept that our heavenly Father was inviting them into a familial relationship with Him and with one

another. We should speak to God with the same warmth that we would use in speaking to our physical fathers – in a respectful, loving and conversational manner.

The reference to God's "dwelling in heaven" reminds us that His perspective is different from and superior to our own (Isaiah 55:8-9). In our prayers, we should acknowledge God's "name". This applies not just to the words God or Father but to His great office and holy character. Unlike so many around us we should never use any of His names or attributes in a blasphemous way, for example as an expression of surprise or anger.

Our prayers should include praise for what He has done, such as thanking Him for features of His marvellous creation. Or they might include praise for His qualities, such as His merciful and forgiving nature or His goodness and generosity.

In the next segment of the model prayer, Jesus said that we should pray often for God to establish His Kingdom on earth. (Our booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom* explains this truly significant aspect of the plan of God and helps you understand how and why to include it in your prayers.)

Following this section, Jesus said that we should pray that God's will be done. Regular, effective Bible study will lead to an understanding of God's will so that we can pray about this in an informed manner. (Our detailed *Bible Study Course* can be of help here. All our publications are free for the asking. Or you can find them online at the literature library of our Website at [www.ucg.org](http://www.ucg.org).)

## Personal requests

The part of praying that comes naturally to most people is asking God to bless us with what we want! We should feel free to ask for what we need and even what we may want beyond our needs in accordance with God's will. Of course, we need to guard against selfishness. It's easy for prayers to become a list of "gimmies," a virtual divine shopping list. Here we might pray for the needs of others and ask for wisdom in providing help or encouragement when we are able.

A truly vital part of praying includes spiritual self-examination and repentance, a process by which we acknowledge and turn from sins. Before we can truly

repent, we must know what sin is and what God expects of us. (To assist you in this area, we recommend that you review our booklets *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* and *The Ten Commandments*.) As we pray for forgiveness for ourselves, we are also to extend forgiveness towards others. This can be one of the hardest issues for many. Readers may find our booklet *Forgiveness is Possible* helpful.

## A lifestyle

Prayer is an essential part of the life of a Christian. Much of learning how to pray comes through practice – the more a person prays the more he will learn how to do so effectively. Jesus indicated we should pray daily. At any time of day and in any circumstance, we can offer instantaneous prayers. The apostle Paul suggests we should always be in a prayerful attitude (1 Thessalonians 5:17). However the type of prayer Christ spoke of in Luke 11 and Matthew 6 is lengthier and more worshipful. Bible examples of prayer indicate that we should generally pray this kind of prayer on our knees in privacy.

If a follower of Christ wishes to maintain and grow in his or her relationship with our heavenly Father, adequate time must be devoted to prayer. The Bible gives

no set length, and Jesus warned against thinking God is somehow pleased with long, elaborate prayers (Matthew 6:7). On the other hand, be careful of neglecting God by limiting ourselves to a set time span for prayer. As you gain experience and your relationship with God grows, you will find the time passes quickly, and it even becomes difficult to pray about everything that is important to you. This will enhance the substance and quality time spent in prayer. Further information on prayer can be found in the first chapter of our study aid *Tools for Spiritual Growth*.

Remember even when God does respond, the answer could be yes, no, or not yet. The parents of John the Baptist had requested a child. The positive response came in their old age as the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke explains. Similarly Abraham and Sarah waited a long time for their promised son, Isaac. So often faith-building patience and trust go along with prayer.



## Conditions for answered prayer

*It is only logical that God expects us to fulfil certain conditions if we desire His help.*

**W**hilst God decides whether or not, or when, to answer an individual's prayer, it is unlikely He will answer those whose attitude is not right or who is unwilling to do his or her part. So what does God expect of us when we come to Him in prayer?

- Obedience is a vital condition for answered prayer. If we expect God to hear and respond positively, we must obey the Ten Commandments and His other instructions (1 John 3:22).

- Confess your sins to God and repent so that they no longer stand in the way (Isaiah 59:1-2). Remember that to be forgiven, we must be forgiving of others (Matthew 6:12, 14-15).

- One's motives should not be selfish, greedy or trying to impress others (James 4:2-3; Matthew 6:5-6; Luke 18:9-14).

- Study the Bible to know and pray according to God's mind and will (John 15:7; 1 John 5:14-15; Matthew 4:4).

- Believe – have full faith in God's love, mercy and promises – and expect answers (Mark 11:24; Hebrews 11:6; James 1:5-6).

- Be extremely grateful to God and express thanksgiving and praise profusely (Philippians 4:6; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

- Be wholehearted, fervent and passionate in prayer (James 5:16; Psalm 119:145; Hosea 7:14).

- Multiple repetitions of words and phrases are worthless, although Christ taught persistence in repeating a petition to God day after day (Matthew 6:7-8; Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-7).

- Ask God to guide and inspire you with His Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14-15, 26-27; John 14:26).





**Q** Why does God allow Satan the devil to influence mankind?

FAQ

**A** It's helpful to look at this question from the point of view of the principal purpose God has for mankind. He certainly wants everyone to receive salvation. But there is far more to it than Him forgiving our sins. God extends His grace to us, but we also have a part to play. Compare a human parent who forgives a child's errors and weaknesses, but does nothing to help him or her develop. That would leave the child ill-equipped to deal with life. God wants His offspring to reflect Christ.

Genuine conversion grows out of a process, not from a singular prayer of commitment to "accept Christ as our Saviour." The process requires time, during which we learn right from wrong, choose to do what is right and then exercise the personal will to follow up on our choices day in and day out. This all contributes to the development of the strength we need to live as we should.

By way of analogy, compare spiritual growth to the development of muscle strength. Pulling or working against resistance is the only way to strengthen muscles. Routine activities like walking or swimming build strength, but weight resistance greatly enhances strength building. On the spiritual plane, growth also occurs when we pull against resistance. Some of that resistance comes from our own fallible human nature; some from the evil world we inhabit.

This is where Satan serves a purpose in God's plan. Having to resist his temptations greatly enhances our potential to build spiritual strength. God never allows Satan to destroy the Christian, but He will allow us to battle against Satan for our ultimate good – to gain strength that only comes by fighting against resistance.

Of course, it's not quite the same for the world in

general, for God is not calling the vast majority to salvation at this time. Yet, Satan's presence serves a purpose for the unconverted. His influence intensifies the evil of this present world but God will not allow him to destroy humankind.

This is explained further on pages 16-17 of *Is There Really a Devil?* and in *Why Does God Allow Suffering?*

**Q** Revelation 6:9-11 refers to "the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God." Can you explain who these are please?

FAQ

**A** Verse 9 states that these martyred Christians are "under the altar." If one takes this literally, it would mean that God crammed the many dead saints beneath His altar in heaven. The language is clearly symbolic. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 makes it clear that deceased Christians remain in the grave until Christ returns. When we allow the Bible to interpret itself, Revelation 6:9 cannot mean that anyone is in heaven now. Rather, it is both a prophecy that martyrdom would occur and that it would continue until the second coming of Christ.

You can read more about how this section of Scripture fits into the overall framework of Bible prophecy in our booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* under the section explaining about the fifth seal.

## Let the Bible answer...

### **What does the Bible teach about being "cancelled" for opening up to others about our faith in God and His teachings?**

*"Cancelling" is a modern term, however the Bible contains some principles that apply.*

*We must not deny Christ, nor allow fear to influence us from putting God and His word first in our lives: Matthew 10:24-28, 32-33, 37-38. We should honour Christ as we honour the Father: John 5:22-23.*

*We should be sufficiently knowledgeable of the scriptures that we can answer anyone who asks about our beliefs: 1 Peter 3:13-17. We should answer everyone with grace and wisdom: Colossians 4:5-6.*

*Avoid deliberate provocation or making derogatory statements about others, especially on social media (Proverbs 26:21).*



## Letters From Our Readers

### Basics of prayer

Your insightful articles are not only stimulating and refreshing but make me think and wait on the God of creation for more revelation! Can human prayer change anything? Or is it that what will be, will be?

*Reader in Borehamwood*

*Editor's comment: We have sent you some literature on the subject of prayer. You may also be interested in the article on page 5 of this Supplement, which covers some of what Christ taught about prayer.*

### Coping with life

My wife has dementia and can be very tiring but you give me the strength to carry on. I feel that you give me the reason to devote my full time to her.

*Reader in North Cornwall*

*Editor's comment: We are sorry to hear of your wife's condition and pray for Christ to strengthen you (Philippians 4:13).*

These are scary times we live in but these booklets help. It's great work you are doing.

*Reader in Scotland*

### The Gospel advances

I really enjoy reading your publications. My daughter showed me some and I would like some of my own to keep.

*Reader in Lancashire*

*Editor's comment: We have added you to our subscriber list and sent you the literature you requested.*

I look forward to your magazine. It is very informative and explains in layman's terms how to understand and read the Bible.

*Reader in Wales*

I eagerly await every two months for *Beyond Today*. I learn a lot reading your magazine. Please continue sending it.

*Reader in Croydon*

I always find [your literature]

enlightening. A small contribution is enclosed.

*Reader in Plymouth*

Please continue to send your journals to me. Of all the correspondence I receive, I look forward to *Beyond Today* with eager anticipation. Thank you for the inspiration it gives me. Please accept this small donation.

*Reader in Northampton*

*Editor's comment: Your specific question has been sent to one of our elders for a personal reply.*

### Learn more

Throughout this *Bible Study Course*, I have gained a better understanding of the Bible and God's plan for mankind.

*Reader in North Yorkshire*

**Our literature can be downloaded from our website at [www.ucg.org](http://www.ucg.org) or requested from the address at the bottom of the front page.**

## How you can help

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Jesus Christ instructed His disciples that as they had freely received they were to freely give (Matthew

10:8), so we supply our literature free of charge, making Christ's message available to all. Our gratitude goes to those who assist financially in this aspect of the Church's work.

Donations may be sent to *Beyond Today* or United Church of God, PO Box 705, Watford WD19 6FZ, United Kingdom; or online at [www.ucg.org.uk/donate.html](http://www.ucg.org.uk/donate.html) through PayPal. Donations can also be made directly to our bank account. Please contact us for details.

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