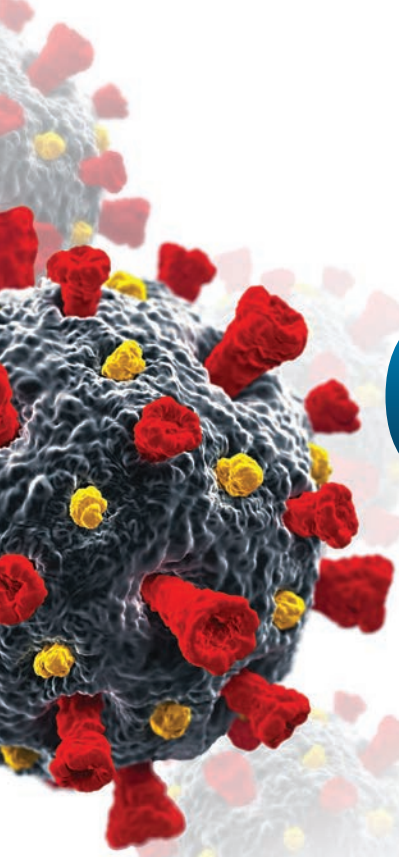


T R U T H M A T T E R S

SIGNS OF THE TIMES®

COVID-19

Facing^{the}
Crisis With
Confidence



COVID-19

Defining the Disease

The world is on high alert as it wrestles with COVID-19. In a few short months, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which is causing the Coronavirus Disease 19 (COVID-19), has spread widely from its epicenter in Wuhan, China. Worldwide, hundreds of thousands have been infected with this new virus and thousands have died. Conditions are developing so rapidly; it is difficult to keep pace. Casualties are expected to skyrocket in the weeks and months to come. Undoubtedly, COVID-19 calls for thoughtful action and the courage to resist panic.

According to the World Health Organization, COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus.¹ Presently, there are no clinically tested and approved vaccines to halt this spreading virus. Some international borders have been closed. Schools have suspended classes. Some businesses are requiring employees to work from home. Restaurants are closed. Theaters, amusement parks, and other entertainment venues have also closed their doors. Sporting events and large conventions have been canceled. People have been told to avoid gatherings of more than ten. “Social distancing” is the new norm.

In some countries, medical systems have become overwhelmed. In the United States, the stock market has plunged, unemployment is rising, and the economy creeps toward meltdown. Reports of coronavirus dominate the news, stirring fear and even hysteria in thousands of people. It is too early to estimate the fallout from COVID-19, but there is little doubt that our lives have been dramatically changed.

Given these shocking developments, the following thoughts are a response to the most significant global health crisis of the twenty-



first century. Knowing the facts will keep your fears at bay and help you face the future with hope.

Naturally, the first step in our response to this crisis is to identify the enemy. What is the “novel coronavirus”? This virus is novel because our immune systems have never seen it before. The current virus comes from a large family of viruses called by the same name and is one of the causes of the common cold. Scientifically speaking, we have all had coronavirus. Under a microscope, this strain of viruses looks like a crown, hence the name *corona*. SARS-CoV-2 is the seventh type of coronavirus and is responsible for the new disease, COVID-19.

*COVID-19 calls for thoughtful action
and the courage to resist panic.*

The Sars-CoV-2 virus, similar to influenza, is transmitted by droplet spread, which means that when an infected person sneezes or coughs, the droplets containing the virus can enter the eyes, nose, or mouth of another person. Once airborne, the droplets travel short distances, generally less than 3 feet, and drop rapidly to the ground. If any of the drops land on a nearby-uninfected individual and gain access to the eyes, nose, or mouth that person can become infected. Significantly, no contact with the

One of the primary challenges of this disease is that it can spread through asymptomatic people.

infected person is necessary. The infected person may have already left the area. The disease can also be contracted by touching a surface containing the germs and then touching the eyes, nose, or mouth. This means that an ordinary surgical mask is not a failsafe means of protection.

In terms of how contagious it is, let's compare SARS-CoV-2 to influenza. As we do this, remember that this is called a novel coronavirus because no one has developed an immunity to it.

One person with seasonal influenza may infect 1.3 people, while a person with SARS-CoV-2 can infect at least 2 to 2.5 people. If they are super-spreaders, they can infect many more people. One of the primary challenges of this disease is that it can spread through asymptomatic people. In other words, you may have a family member, a work colleague, or a casual contact who exhibits none of the classic symptoms yet continues to move through life with the disease—unwittingly infecting others.

The symptoms

The symptoms of novel coronavirus are what you might expect from a disease of this nature.



The most common symptom is fever, occurring in about 90 percent of the cases. Other symptoms include a dry cough, fatigue, and shortness of breath. COVID-19 indications are similar to other viral illnesses, but it has an affinity for the lungs. In fact, more than 55 percent of affected persons have abnormal CT Scans when they present to the medical system.

A person's risk of contracting the disease depends on where they live and where they have traveled. In this regard, we have learned a lot from Italy and South Korea. These two countries experienced stark differences in their death rate. Among those tested in South Korea, the mortality rate was less than 1 percent, while the death rate in Italy was more than 6 percent. The primary risk factor seems to be related to the age of the infected population. In Italy, the average age was greater than 70 years old, while in South Korea, the average age was less than 60. In addition to age, people with heart disease had a death rate of 10.5 percent. The risk of death also significantly increased in those with diabetes, lung problems, and high blood pressure. Although, 85 percent of the cases are mild, about 10 percent require oxygen, and as much as 5 percent require a ventilator (breathing machine). Regardless of age, however, everyone should be careful because new reports indicate that younger people are not immune. Anyone with lungs is susceptible to the disease. Naturally, you are concerned with what you can do to avoid COVID-19, so let's address the issue from two perspectives—prevention and immunity.

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Symptoms of coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

- * Fever
- * Dry cough
- * Fatigue
- * Sputum production
- * Shortness of breath
- * Muscle or joint pain
- * Sore throat
- * Headache
- * Chills
- * Nausea or vomiting
- * Nasel congestion
- * Diarrhea

Many of the most common symptoms are shared with those of the flu or cold. So it is also good to know which symptoms of the flu or common cold are not symptoms of COVID-19.

COVID-19 infections seem to rarely cause a runny nose.

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Prevention and Immunity

As we noted earlier, wearing a surgical mask is no guarantee that you will not get sick. The reason is that the virus can enter through the eyes. Additionally, when one wears a mask, there are more “face touches” to adjust the mask, and this touching increases the chance of infection.

The problem with surgical masks is that they have a loose fit and tend to leak around the edges. That is why the N95 respirator mask offers improved protection. It filters out 95 percent of small and large particles and is also tight fitting,

reducing the wearer’s exposure to large droplets and particles.

Mask use can be an important prevention measure but impeccable hand hygiene is a must for everyone. Wash with soap and water for 20 seconds. Make it easy by slowly counting to 20 as you scrub your hands! If you blow your nose, use a disposable tissue and place it in the trash can promptly. Do not store it in your pocket.

Next, avoid touching your face—particularly your eyes, nose, and mouth. Carry hand sanitizer

with you and use it often. Use disinfectant on all solid surfaces, including doorknobs and toilet handles! Keep your distance from people. As mentioned earlier, droplets from sneezing or coughing travel three feet, so allow six feet between you and another person. If you have any fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, headache, muscle ache, or other symptoms, stay home and rest.

Building your immune system:

A critical issue with COVID-19, and other diseases for that matter, is the status of the immune system. This system is a complex network of cells and proteins that defends our bodies against infections and disease. If you build a robust immune system, not only do you reduce the risk of getting the virus, but if you do get it, the symptoms will tend to be much less, and the duration of your illness will be even shorter.

Here are a few ways to strengthen your immune system:

A critical issue with COVID-19, and other diseases for that matter, is the status of the immune system.



Eat healthfully. Nutrition is vital in dealing with any illness, both as prevention and assistance with the cure. Fruits and vegetables, as well as whole grains, reduce inflammation and improve blood vessel function. Plant foods are loaded with health-promoting, protective phytochemicals that neutralize the oxidative stress of infections and other diseases. They reduce inflammation in the lungs and enhance the health of the blood vessel lining to assure the needed blood supply. Animal protein, on the other hand, contains inflammatory substances. Plant foods, such as kale and other green leafy vegetables, provide the building blocks to produce the substance that makes blood vessels work well. Be sure to include a rainbow of fruit and vegetable colors on your plate. Their protective nutrients in your diet will help prevent disease and aid recovery should you get sick. Of course, avoid sugar because it impairs white blood cell function, which is vital in fighting off foreign substances.



Get plenty of rest. One God-given principle of good health is rest. When we are ill, our bodies recover best when we rest. Even when we think we have recovered, it is best to take two to three additional days to rest. This may be particularly important with COVID-19 because we do not know for sure when recovery occurs. Genetic material from the virus may be shed from the nostrils for up to four weeks. So get your rest.





Drink lots of water. Water protects the body from dehydration, allowing every cell to function and fight at peak performance. So drink lots of water! How much? At least eight eight-ounce glasses a day. Another way to monitor your consumption is to drink enough so that you have at least one clear urine per day. Make sure to finish your daily water intake before 6 P.M. so that your sleep is uninterrupted.

Get adequate fresh air and exercise. The issue of exercise is also important, and we recommend, whenever possible that individuals be out in the sunshine—even if it is cold. Exercise is profoundly helpful in warding off disease. A nineteenth-century health educator wrote with penetrating insight, “Deep inspirations of pure air, which fill the lungs with oxygen, purify the blood.”²

Increase hot and cold contrasting exposure. The exposure to cold is another key to recovery from infectious diseases. We recommend a hot shower for three to five minutes, followed by a cold shower for about 30 seconds. Alternate these three times, ending with cold water. Cold stimulates the immune system. Though many struggle with it at first, try standing in a hot shower for three to five minutes; then slowly turn the water as cold as you can stand it. It is surprising how quickly our bodies allow us to tolerate cold water for 30 seconds. Although we may not be able to avoid getting sick with the coronavirus, we can put our immune systems in the best possible position to fight it.


Eradicating COVID-19

It is important to recognize that this disease, just like influenza, is more likely to be managed than eradicated. This management happens in three primary ways. First, over a period of time, a

Water protects the body from dehydration, allowing every cell to function and fight at peak performance.

population can develop an immunity to the virus. Second, vaccines are being developed to prevent infection. This process requires research, and it can take 12 to 18 months to develop an effective vaccine.


Last, many antiviral drugs are on the horizon for this specific virus. Again, it could take months to develop them. For this reason, the best way forward is an emphasis on prevention and the use of natural remedies that we refer to as God’s health principles. After all, He designed us for health! “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).³



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Is COVID-19 the End of the World?

COVID-19 has created tremendous angst in many people and it is natural to ask the question. Where is God in all of this? Are these His judgments, or are they random events? What does the Bible say about pestilences and pandemics? Is this a sign of the end of the world? How can we overcome fear and fill ourselves with hope in times of crisis?

Let us assure you, God is not the author of sickness. He is not the originator of suffering or disease. In the first chapter of the Bible, it says that at the end of the creation week God looked out over the world pronounced it “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Sickness was not part of His original plan. His plan was for the earth to be populated with people who were happy, healthy, and holy.

Sin was introduced into the world by Lucifer. In heaven he had been the dazzling lead angel, but he chose to rebel against God and His government. Later, when God created Adam and Eve on planet Earth, He blessed them with the freedom of choice. He longed for them to choose Him out of love. Knowing this, Satan tempted Adam and Eve to choose a path other than God’s way, thus sealing their ruin. The book of Genesis records the sad tale of his success in causing Adam and Eve to doubt God’s love and question His honesty.



When they exercised their freedom of choice and chose to sin, Adam and Eve opened a door of sickness, suffering, and disease that broke God’s heart. Sin brings separation from God, and our broken world is suffering from that separation. It is for this reason that Christ came to restore us to God’s image. In Luke 19:10, the Bible says, “The Son of man came to seek and to save that which

Let us assure you, God is not the author of sickness. He is not the originator of suffering or disease.

was lost.” Ours is a world engulfed in sin, suffering, and disease. Christ came to reveal the Father’s love and redeem this lost world. In His life and death, Jesus showed how much the Father cares for us. Every miracle in the New Testament that Jesus performed speaks to us of a God who cares for us when we suffer. Every time He opened blind eyes, unstopped deaf ears, healed withered arms, and raised dead bodies to life, He was demonstrating how much He loves us. By His death on the cross, He forever demolished Satan’s lie and revealed that He would rather take the guilt, shame, and condemnation of sin upon Himself than have one of us lost. (2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:13).

But Jesus also came to be an example—to model the abundant life. He demonstrated that God is not the one behind sickness. He is not the one behind suffering. He is not the one behind disease. He is the God of abundant life! In the great controversy between good and evil, a rebel angel has defied God and is battling Him for the control of this planet. Sickness, suffering, heartache, and disease are the result of this controversy between good and evil, but through it all God has revealed His love and care. He says, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19, 20).

What about pestilences in the Bible?

The Bible uses the word “pestilence,” or a variation on that word, 81 different times in the New King James version, and the word is used in at least four different ways. Sometimes a disease occurs because we are in a world of sin. For example, consider the story of Job. Did Job’s sin cause the disease that afflicted his body from



head to toe? No. But was he in a sinful world? Yes. And was Satan behind all of that? Certainly. Satan is behind all suffering and disease. We live in a world separated from God’s original plan of complete health and wholeness. It is a world of pathogens, viruses, and germs.

There is a second way that pestilence is used in the Bible. At times pestilences are the judgments of God upon the wicked. You may say that is rather strange but think about Egypt. Were the plagues of ancient Egypt simply natural disasters, or were they God’s judgments to deliver His people? In love, God sent warning after warning to the Egyptians. He graciously sent repeated messages to them to avoid the disaster that was coming but they willfully refused His loving invitations and the judgments of God fell upon the land. Love speaks gently, but at times it also speaks in thunderous tones to get our attention.

A third way the Bible uses pestilence is in the context that God can withdraw His protective



power. There are times when He withdraws His presence and allows the natural result of sin to take place. Do you remember the story of the Israelites being bitten by snakes in the wilderness? Many died of the poisonous venom. God simply withdrew His presence to allow the consequence of their sinful choices to be played out, so they would turn in repentance to His will. When we see pestilences raging in our land, it may be God's clarion call for us to become more serious about our commitment to Christ, experience a deeper repentance, and surrender our lives fully to Him.

The word pestilence is also used in the context of the second coming of Christ, in concert with other signs Jesus gave. Let me hasten to add that we need to avoid two troubling extremes. One extreme is the fanaticism that shouts, "the coronavirus is here, so Jesus must be coming next week, or next month, or next year." People who say this are consumed with fanciful, sensational, time-setting theories not found in the Bible. The other extreme is to dismiss this virus as a natural phenomenon that will soon pass, something that has nothing to do with last day signs. But that attitude does not reflect Jesus' urgency as He described the end in Matthew 24. Addressing end-time signs, Jesus declared, "For nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom.

According to the words of Christ, pestilences are indeed part of the end-time scenario.

And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. These are the beginnings of sorrows" (Matthew 24:7, 8).

For Jesus, wars, rumors of war, the rise of nations, and kingdoms fighting against kingdoms are all part of the end-time scenario. To these conditions, He adds natural disasters, such as earthquakes, famines, and pestilences. All of them are among the more than twenty signs listed in Matthew 24. According to the words of Christ, pestilences are indeed part of the end-time scenario.

A sign of Christ's return?

Does that mean that the COVID-19 virus that has ravaged the world is a sign of Christ's coming? The answer is that it does not stand alone as *the* sign of the end. However, when you look at the larger picture, pestilences are one of the multiple signs that Jesus predicts will occur prior to His return. Events like these indicate that time is running out and that we are living on the verge of Christ's kingdom. The stage is being set for the climactic events described in the prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation.

In light of Christ's predictions in His prophetic Word, what can we expect in the future? Natural disasters will increase. Famines, earthquakes, and pestilences will escalate. Just as in Noah's day when a sinful world full of immorality and violence filled the cup of its iniquity in rebellion against God, so our world is preparing for God's final judgments. God lovingly appeals to a wayward planet. There is nothing more important to Him than saving as many people as possible. When God withdraws His protective power, natural disasters and death-dealing disease run rampant. He does not cause these disasters but uses them to demonstrate the fragility of life. These events drive us to our knees to seek refuge in Christ and the promises of His Word.

Facing the Future With Hope

How can we keep from being consumed by worry and anxiety? What can deliver us from crippling fear? Or, more accurately, *who* can deliver us? The Bible offers God as the only way out for humankind and His promises can help us face catastrophes with hope. We can move forward with confidence, knowing that Christ stands by our side. His promise is sure. "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

In Luke 21, Jesus speaks of our time. "Men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth" (verse 26) The next passage says, "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift your heads, because your redemption draws near" (verses 27, 28).

Whether we are consumed with fear or filled with hope depends on where we are looking. If you are looking at natural disasters, pestilences, and diseases, your heart is going to be filled with fear. Jesus says, "Look up!" Why? When we look to Heaven's sanctuary, we see Jesus and discover strength in His promises. In Christ, we find confidence. In Christ, we experience assurance. In Christ, we are lifted above life's uncertainties and concerns, and our hearts are filled with security in the One who loves us with an everlasting,



undying, unfathomable, exhaustless, endless love. In Christ, we are delivered from our fears.

The Bible repeatedly urges us to “fear not” or “Do not fear.” Although I have not personally counted the number of times the Bible uses this expression, one author has noted 365 times that an expression such as “fear not” is used throughout the Bible—that is one for every day of the year. God has the entire calendar year covered. He invites us to rest in His love, trust in His grace, and rejoice in His power.

In one of the Bible’s most reassuring promises, Isaiah echoes the words of our Lord, “Fear not for I am with you” (Isaiah 41:10). Why don’t we fear? Jesus is with us. Whatever we must go through, He is by our side.

“Fear not for I am with you.
Be not dismayed for I am your God.
I will strengthen you,
I will help you, I will uphold you with my
righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

When we see sickness, suffering, and disease all around us, we need not fear because Jesus is with us. Earlier in the book of Isaiah, the inspired word states,

“Say to those who are fearful-hearted,
“Be strong, do not fear!
Behold, your God will come with vengeance,
With the recompense of God;
He will come and save you” (Isaiah 35:4).

Why don’t we need to fear? The reason we are not to be afraid is not because we believe we will never get sick. No, we are free from paralyzing fear because we believe that whatever state we find ourselves in, Christ will be with us.

You remember that Job experienced a terrible pestilence that horribly afflicted His body. In the midst of his suffering, he cried out in confidence,

“For I know that my redeemer lives,
And He shall stand at last on the earth;
And after my skin is destroyed, this I know,
That in my flesh I shall see God” (Job 19:25, 26).

One of the major reasons we do not live in fear is because God has revealed the future.

Job had the absolute assurance that a better day was coming and that one day He would see God face to face. Until then, with hope and confidence he could exclaim, “Though he slays me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15). Job lived a life of trust in the God who not only promised to be with him each moment of the day, but also assured him that a better tomorrow was coming.

Even if we develop a life-threatening disease, our faith clings to the promise that one day Jesus will come again to take us home. Like Job, we believe that we will see Him face to face. Jesus speaks these reassuring words to us, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1–3). Soon Jesus will come again and on that wonderful day, we will be caught up in the clouds in the sky to meet Him in the air. Sickness and suffering will be forever eradicated. Disease and death will find no place in the presence of our loving God.

Faith does not mean we believe we will never get sick. We live in a broken world and though we may do the best we can to make healthy choices, sickness may still afflict us. In this case, we simply grasp the promise of His abiding presence. He is with us through sickness and disease. He does not leave us when a virus attacks our body. As the old song says, “Just when I need Him, Jesus is near.”

One of the major reasons we do not live in fear is because God has revealed the future. We know that sickness will not have the last word: Christ will. We know the coronavirus, or any other virus, natural disaster, calamity, or nuclear war, will not destroy all life on planet Earth. We have the promise of Jesus’ return. We see famines. We see earthquakes. We see the distress of nations. We

see the potential of a disastrous nuclear war. We see climate change. We see diseases taking the lives of thousands.

We see these things, but we have a hope that enables us to thrive in life’s toughest times. There is a sense of confidence that carries us through because we have read the last chapters of the Bible. We know how the story ends. In Revelation 21, verses 4 and 5, John writes,

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.

Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.”

We are “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). This blessed hope helps us look beyond what is to what will be. We look beyond today to tomorrow. We look beyond sickness to health. We look beyond the viruses drifting through the air to the pure air where there will be no more pestilences.

God has a purpose in permitting these calamities to occur. He is calling us to complete dependence on Him. He is revealing to us that there is no certainty in this world. Christ is our only assurance, our only security. He is our only Savior, Redeemer, Deliverer, and coming King.

Here are some sites that will help you improve your physical, mental, and spiritual health.

- “Facing the Future With Confidence,” Adventist Medical Evangelism Network, <https://amensda.org/facingthefuturewithconfidence>
- “God Cares Everyday,” Adventist Laymen’s Services and Industries, <https://godcareseveryday.org/>
- Hope Lives 365, <https://hopelives365.com/>
- “Coronavirus Pandemic, COVID-19,” General Conference Adventist Health Ministries, <http://healthministries.com/coronavirus>

What should be our response to the rise of COVID-19? It seems that recent events should prompt an awakening in our hearts. The onslaught of COVID-19 should rouse our spiritual senses to the urgency of our times. It should remind us that this broken world is not our forever home.

In the midst of this tragic pandemic, Christ is speaking to you and to me. Our lives are fragile. Each of us lives in a mortal body and Jesus wants to deliver us from fear and assure us of eternal life. Now is a good time to let Him fill your heart, strengthen your resolve, and prepare you for His soon return.

1. “Coronavirus,” World Health Organization, https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1

2. Ellen G. White, Ministry of Healing (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1942), 272.

3. All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



Hope in Troubled Times

Troubled times come to us all. Whether it is a financial crisis, a health crisis, or a personal or family crisis, we all face times when the day is bleak and the forecast for tomorrow doesn't seem any brighter. What we need is hope—hope that someone somewhere cares about our situation, hope that tomorrow will be better, hope that there is a permanent solution to all of the troubles of this life.

Psalm 121:1–4, “I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.” *

Jeremiah 29:11–13, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.”

Psalm 31:24, “Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the Lord.”

Romans 15:13, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”



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