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by Berni Dymet



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Flourishing in the House of the Lord

Discover God's amazing plan for you and your church.

christianityworks

flourishing in the house
of the Lord

by berni dymet

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CONTENTS

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| 1. Community and commitment | 1 |
| <i>Life Application</i> | |
| - <i>My attitude towards 'church'</i> | 12 |
| 2. Pot-bound Christians | 15 |
| <i>Life Application</i> | |
| - <i>Am I a pot-bound Christian?</i> | 26 |
| 3. It's not that hard really | 29 |
| <i>Time to pray</i> | 36 |

COMMUNITY AND COMMITMENT

Have you ever noticed that the more money we earn, the more choices we have; and the more choices we have, the busier we are with work and with kids ... and so we become tired? It's such a common cycle – in fact, it's almost a plague in our society. We're all so busy and so tired.

And so these days, creating a sense of 'community' is pretty hard. There are lots of lonely people around the country and around the world and yet God has this plan for *His family* God has a plan that His family should get together and **be** a family and that plan is called 'church'.

Now, for a lot of people ‘church’ is a four letter word, if you take my drift. A lot of people are browned off with church. They’ve tried it and they’ve had enough. So much so that the experts are starting to write text books about this huge number of Bible-believing Christians who have decided they are not doing Church any more. And for someone who hasn’t come to faith yet in Jesus Christ, the whole notion of ‘church’ can be old fashioned, out of date and irrelevant. So ‘church’ gets a lot of bad press.

Yet in Psalm 68:6 God Himself writes:

God sets the lonely in families.

So God has a plan for His children, for His people, to be part of a family. And that family is called ‘the church’.

At the same time society as a whole is struggling with creating a genuine sense of community. Out there in everyday life lots of people are struggling to connect with one another but a lot of people never do. A lot of people are very lonely.

And to tell you the truth in many parts, the church too is struggling to create a genuine sense of community. So often churches come up with programs: they have a program for the youth, the young marrieds, the seniors, and all sorts of other programs. It's almost like you're going to McChurch and being processed through a whole bunch of programs.

But community is all about relationships – people connecting with people. Community's about ... well, it's organic isn't it? It's people naturally getting on with one another, living with one another as a family, helping one another and compensating for one another. But in many a church – especially those churches where there's little or no sense of community – that organic relationships are replaced by 'the program for this' and 'the program for that'. Many people have experienced that and it's incredibly sad.

I was reading something that a man by the name of Malcolm Langford once wrote. He's a lawyer and a musician, and this is one of his poems:

*I have a dream of a Christian community that
when I entered you were excited to see me.*

When I revealed my wounds, you held me close.

When I lost my job, you paid my rent.

When I needed a home, you became my family.

*When I followed billboards, you led me to the
cross.*

*When I ran after mini loves, you opened my
eyes to the Lover.*

*When I was self-absorbed, you taught me to
love the broken.*

*When I hurt others, you showed me the strug-
gle for justice.*

*When I destroyed everything, you helped me to
create beauty.*

*When I let you see my true self, you celebrated
my journey.*

*And when one day Heaven's glories opened to
call me home, I was torn.*

That's a beautiful verse isn't it? It's a beautiful picture of what a Christian community *should* be like. But sadly a lot aren't. Sadly a lot of peo-

ple attend church with the right intention – the intention of worshipping God; the intention of hearing His Word proclaimed; the intention of being a part of the family – but they don't ever experience that place where they love and are loved; where they support and are supported; where they care and are cared for.

People go to Church with that intention, that desire to connect, yet so many churches struggle in this area of community. After all, if church isn't a family, if the church doesn't provide community, well, we might as well just stay home and listen to sermons on the radio or on CD. That's great, but it doesn't help us to be part of a family.

Churches can *do* programs, they can *do* ministry activities, we can *do* and *do* and *do* till we're blue in the face and yet still not build relationships and still not have a sense of community. Community: it's the Holy Spirit stirring in our hearts and moving our hands – you and me. So, we're going to look at two key impediments to that sense of community, name



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them, identify them and I pray, help to remove them.

The first of those impediments is the one of **commitment**. Let's think about a relationship for just a moment. As a relationship between two people matures, it moves from being a casual or passing association, to ultimately becoming a relationship of commitment. Marriage is like that. You know, boy meets girl; they're attracted to one another; they might date for a while; they might stop dating; they might date again. Progressively they go through a process of growing commitment: of becoming engaged, of spending some time in engagement, then becoming married and the whole 'marriage thing' is supposed to be a life-long commitment to one another.

As that commitment begins with marriage so the relationship deepens and matures – that's God's plan. I know it doesn't always work out that way; I know that almost half of all marriages end in divorce. But God's plan of a mature relationship between a man and a

woman is that they be a husband and a wife together, in union and live through all the ups and downs of life – sickness and health, richer and poorer, better and worse – supporting one another, caring for one another and yes, enjoying one another too.

When you think of it like that, well ... it's a pretty good plan this plan for relationships and community.

In the New Testament there are two Greek words for the English word '*church*'. (Now I don't normally focus on Greek words but this is important.)

The first is the Greek word '*ecclesia*'. It means '*assembly*'. I guess that's what we do in church on Sundays, mornings or evenings or whenever ... when the church meets and gathers together. It's the word from where we get '*ecclesiastical*'.

The other Greek word for '*church*' in the New Testament is '*koinonia*'. It means '*a fellowship*'. It comes from a group of words that have a root meaning of 'to share something

in common'. You can do '*ecclesia*', you can meet together Sundays, Saturdays, whenever you meet as an assembly and yet have zero commitment. But you can't do '*koinonia*' church (that's 'fellowship' church) without commitment being the foundation of the relationship. You might say, "Well, I'm committed to church, I think".

Well, let's look at what God says in Psalm 92:12-15. This is a great passage. He says this:

The righteous flourish like a palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord; and they flourish in the courts of our God. In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap, showing that the Lord is upright; he is my rock and there is no unrighteousness in him.

So it seems that the plan for us is that we should be trees like the cedars of Lebanon and like palm trees planted in the House of the Lord.

The problem is that these days many of us want to be 'pot plant' Christians. We don't want to put our roots down in the House of the

Lord. We don't want to be part of the fellowship. We want to say, "Well, I'm a Christian and I don't need those other Christians. After all many of them are a pain in the neck so what I'll be is a pot plant Christian. In my pot I'll be protected: I won't be hurt; I won't be disillusioned; I'll just keep myself to myself."

Maybe you've been through that in the past in a church and you've had enough. The hurt has never gone away and so you've put yourself in a pot instead of being planted in the House of the Lord.

You've put yourself in a pot instead of being there in God's house where we're intended to flourish. Now, you put a pot in the wind and it dries out, it blows over. Ultimately, you put a pot out there in the weather and the chances are the tree will die. To flourish means to grow well, to thrive, luxuriate, to be at a time of the highest productivity and excellence and influence.

My hunch is, it's not up to us to transplant ourselves from one church to another. You've probably heard of that term, 'going church

shopping'. Well Isaiah 61:3 says that "*we are all trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord*". In other words, we are planted where God chooses to plant us.

Am I planted in the right place? Am I? Are you?

Well, there are two answers to that question. What does God want? And what do our feelings tell us? And frankly sometimes those two are different. Are we prepared to put the calling of the Holy Spirit above our feelings and say, "Lord, am I planted in the right place? Have you got me in the right place?" If the answer's 'Yes' from God then it's time to get committed. But if the answer's 'No', well, we better find out where God wants to plant us and go there and be committed in that place, in that fellowship.

LIFE APPLICATION

My attitude towards 'church'

So many, many people are struggling with this whole notion of church and yet God's plan is for us to *flourish* in His house. And in part, I think that's because of the attitudes that we carry around in our hearts and minds about this thing they call 'church'.

I wonder what your attitudes are? Here are some questions that might help you uncover those. Maybe it would be worth writing down your answers, just to ponder them and ask yourself not only why they've developed, but how they're impacting your ability to be in committed church relationships.

1. *When you hear the word ‘Church’ – what thoughts spring to mind? What feelings come to the fore?*
2. *Are there any experiences with church or the people in church from the past that really stand out?*
3. *Are there any disappointments or concerns that you have with your church?*

It’s often our past experience that clouds our perception of God’s plan. In fact for many people, experiences have completely blotted out God’s plan, and that plan is simply this: You and I, we’re meant to flourish in the House of the Lord. FLOURISH!

That is a word of such abundant blessing, isn’t it? It is a plan that God has for us that is so rich.

But sadly, many, many people recoil from that plan; we pull back because of the experiences of the past. And it’s that pulling back that we’re now going to have a look at in the next chapter.

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POT-BOUND CHRISTIANS

We're taking a look at what it means to *flourish* in the House of the Lord. See, 'flourish' is a wonderful word, such an abundant word. And that's God's Word for what He wants for you and me in His family; in this thing we call 'church'.

Now sometimes people who call themselves Christians, well, they've had enough of the 'church' thing. Lots have. Lots have left and yet still believe in Jesus Christ. Instead of being planted in the House of the Lord, they've become (as we saw in the last chapter) pot plant Christians.

Have you seen a tree or a plant that's pot-bound? You pull it out of its pot and its roots are all twisted and tangled and sometimes you can't even get it out of its pot. De-potting a tree can be painful and sometimes you even have to break the pot or prune the root ball, but it's necessary for a healthy tree.

Remember, Psalm 92:13 says this: "*When they are planted in the house of the Lord they will flourish in the courts of our God*".

Have you ever been in an office building and seen a lovely plant display? The plants are in individual pots that have been grouped in a container or trough and covered with bark or stones. There's this illusion that they are all in one pot, but in reality, under the stones or the gravel or the bark, they're still in separate pots, separated from one another.

Let's not kid ourselves! Am I pot-bound? Are you pot-bound? Are we attending a church or being part of a Christian fellowship and yet still not putting our roots down, still not truly being part of God's plan?



De-potting a tree can be painful and sometimes you even have to break the pot or prune the root ball, but it's necessary for a healthy tree.

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What's my pot? What's your pot? Is it maybe a past hurt? Is it maybe a cultural thing – you don't feel that you fit in with the other people? Have we become cynical? Are we afraid of being hurt? I don't feel like this or I don't feel like that, or I feel like I'm out of place? There are so many reasons for us being pot-bound.

But an amazing thing happens when you take a plant out of the pot. Maybe the plant's small and stunted, and you put it in the ground, but then, then it's roots go down deep into the earth – like an attitude of heart that we need to have, a deep attitude of heart – it gets strength; it grows; it does things it could never have done in the pot and it bears the most amazing fruit.

Now, you might say to me, “Berni, I've been to a church or I go to a church but I just feel dead in this so called fellowship. I feel like there are no connections; there's no relationship”.

Have you ever seen a deciduous tree during winter? It looks dead; it looks just like a bunch of sticks that have died. Yet, in the season of winter, in the time of trial - cold, windy, blow-

ing – that tree is storing up sap and getting ready to blossom in the spring.

So often God calls people to a fellowship, calls them into a place but they transplant themselves before they ever bear fruit. In Luke's Gospel there's a parable, a story that Jesus told. He said:

A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; (That was an odd thing to do) and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil? And the gardener replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig it around and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down'. (Luke 13:6-9)

What, let me ask you, was a fig tree doing in a vineyard?

The answer is, that the owner – for whatever reason – decided to plant it there.

Sometimes we feel a bit like that fig tree in the vineyard. Sometimes we look at the vines

and they look at us. They're growing grapes and we're the odd one out, growing figs (instead of grapes) and we think to ourselves, "I don't belong here".

Yet in this parable it was clearly the owner's choice where to plant the fig tree. And what I love is that the Lord never actually tells us why! (Get the point?)

Now in God's family, I believe it's God's choice where to plant the fig tree – you and me. "Oh I feel this; I feel that; it's hard".

Sure, but ... *'The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord'*. I don't believe it's up to us to get up and go. Are we operating in the flesh or are we operating in the spirit? Are we following our feelings or are we following God? If the owner came looking for you where He planted you, would He find you there? And would He find you bearing fruit? Because a mature tree should be producing fruit. It should be, dare I say it ... *flourishing!*

It's not a tree inspection. The owner isn't coming to look at the bark or the texture, shape

and colour of the leaves. The owner is looking for fruit. God is the owner. God's not interested in looks and feelings so much; God's interested in fruit. And in the church, God wants it to be full of established trees producing fruit; flourishing in the courts of our God; flourishing in the House of the Lord.

Something is wrong, seriously wrong, if there's no fruit!

Maybe if you go to God and you pray about it, maybe God will tell you, "I think you're in the wrong church, I'd like you to move over here. Go on, go". Now my hunch is that's going to be far in the minority, vastly in the minority, because there is no perfect church. But if you feel that God's saying to you, "I've got somewhere else for you to go, there's a new fellowship, a new thing that I'm doing, get up and go". Well, go!

But if God comes back to you when you pray about this and says, "No. No, you're in the place that I've planted you". Well, maybe it's time to say, "God, if I'm in the right place, if this is

where you would have me planted, even though I feel as if I'm a fig tree amongst the grape vines, I am going to break the pot. I'm going to get committed. I'm going to put my roots down here in the House of the Lord where you've planted me – albeit it that it looks more like a vineyard and I feel more like a fig tree.”

So, that's the first impediment – **the lack of commitment.**

The second one is **being judgemental.** You may have heard me speak about these verses in Matthew before, in a different context. Jesus says:

Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgement you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but you do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbour, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour's eye. (Matthew 7:1-5)

We love to judge other people, especially if we're a fig tree and they're a grape vine. We love to condemn. We love to back stab and to gossip. People do.

"I can't believe what Mary did the other day".

"I don't mean to gossip but ... I would never have done it that way".

How often do you sit down with people who say, "I'm a Christ follower", and you hear them talking like that about other people? It's judgemental. Jesus said, "Don't do it, otherwise you'll be judged by exactly the same measure".

I used to be in bondage to this. I used to have a saying before I came to Christ: "It's so hard to soar like an eagle when you're surrounded by turkeys". I was critical. I used to get so frustrated and it was ruining my life.

I remember when we were first married, when my wife washed her hands she would never wipe down the sink. It used to drive me nuts because I grew up in a house where we were taught to wipe down the sink. Does that make me better than her? No. She just doesn't

wipe down the sink after she has washed her hands. Mind you, she does a lot of others things that I'd never do. Do you see how it's the little foxes that spoil the vine? And the same is true inside a church.

Let's get a revelation here! I have enough of my own sins that God is working through with me without being in bondage to your sins. And let me tell you, that you have enough of your own sins without being in bondage to mine or the sins of other people in your church.

And how do we get into bondage to other people's sins? When we judge them, because it drives us nuts; because we focus on the things they're doing wrong. And when we become judgemental it tears the church family apart just like it does brothers and sisters, husbands and wives and fathers and mothers.

My friend, there is no perfect church. If there was and you and I went to it, it wouldn't be perfect any more. There are no perfect people. It's an absolute given that we will experience first hand the sins of other people if we put

our roots down in a church fellowship, in the House of the Lord. If we say to ourselves, “Hang on a minute, God’s called me to be in this church, He’s called me to be in this place, I’m going to break the pot” – then it’s an absolute, 100% given that we’re going to experience firsthand the sins of others.

That’s the nature of the church, that’s the nature of the beast. We need to stop fighting that. Come on!

You and I, we have strengths and weaknesses, the next person in the church has different strengths and weaknesses, and if I’m going to be a godly Christian – a Spirit-filled, committed, brother in the body of Christ – the question is, will I accept the responsibility of saying to my brothers and sisters, “I’ll love you any way, even when you fail me”?

How about it? Will you do that?

LIFE APPLICATION

Am I a pot-bound Christian?

So many people are struggling with this whole thing of church. Questioning, searching, wondering if this is what it should be like?

And maybe this is an area of your life where you need to sort through a few things. In particular, this tendency to withdraw – to be a pot-bound Christian.

One of the main reasons we withdraw from relationships is to protect ourselves. Another is because we're too busy, or we just can't be bothered. Or perhaps the people we're around in church, they just don't seem to add any value into our lives; they're just dragging us down ... or that's how it seems.

I wonder if any of those sound at all familiar to you? I wonder whether you can identify with this powerful picture of the “pot-bound Christian”? In fact let me ask you, if you are part of a church:

1. *How many close relationships (other than your own family) do you have in your church?*
2. *How satisfying and enriching are those relationships?*
3. *If you were in need – is there anyone in your church that you’d be able to turn to?*
4. *Finally, how fulfilled do you feel in your church relationships?*

In this day and age, my hunch is that many, many a person will ponder these questions, only to discover that they’re pot-bound.

Sad as that may be, turning it around is actually not that hard. That’s what we’re going to look at in the next chapter.

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BE STILL AND KNOW

So here's what we've been talking about.

We come to God's family with a lack of *commitment* and a sense of *judgement*. We wonder why church doesn't feel like a community. It's so easy to go to a family – to a church – and expect to be served rather than to be one of the servants. As I said earlier, you've probably heard that expression 'church shopping' so many times.

But finding and becoming part of a church isn't about asking, as a consumer, 'What's in it for me?'. Personally, the only reason that I would be part of *this* church

rather than *that* church is that God's called me to be in *this* church and not in *that* church.

Well, it's all well and good to talk about trees and roots and pots and figs and grapes, but exactly how do we do this? How can you and I become part of God's family? How can you and I *flourish* in the house of the Lord?

Romans 12:2 says:

"Don't be conformed to the ways of this world".

Can I take the 'world' out and stick in 'church' for the moment?

"Don't be conformed to the ways of this church".

Sometimes in our churches, sometimes in our families, we're dysfunctional. The grape vines are screaming at the fig trees: "Be a grape vine!" The fig trees are screaming at the grape vine. "Be a fig tree!" When all along, it was always God's plan that we should be different and complimentary.

Me, I'm not someone for having lots of people around all the time. I like my own space, I like my own time and that natural disposition, taken to an extreme, can lead to dysfunction.



The grape vines are screaming at the fig trees: “Be a grape vine!” The fig trees are screaming at the grape vine. “Be a fig tree!”

When all along, it was always God’s plan that we should be different and complimentary.

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I've had to learn and spend time reading God's Word and in the process discover there are different ways of doing things. (At the same time, if I was any different, if I didn't enjoy being alone but instead was pastorally gifted, I would get so lonely in my study writing radio programs and books, and in the radio studio recording.)

So, I can bring gifts and weaknesses to the table just as I am, different to the ones that you can bring to the table. If we can only be who we are and open ourselves to the Holy Spirit to work out His love in us, what a wonderful place church would be. Yes, grow; yes, become mature; yes, become holy but don't try to make grapes if you're a fig tree. Make big, succulent, juicy figs whatever the grape vines think about you.

We can over-spiritualize this stuff sometimes, but there are so many little things that you and I can do to exercise our giftings in church; to put our roots down; to share the goodness of God in our lives with other people.

I remember the first church I ever went to, there was a man called Peter. He looked like a big, retired sea captain with the grey beard – straight out of central casting. I was scared of going to church at first; it wasn't what I wanted to do. Let me tell you something, if Peter hadn't come and shaken my hand and smiled and spoken to me and served me, truly I don't know if I would have gone back the next Sunday. I don't know even if I'd be here with you today.

Sometimes we see someone when we go to church on Sunday morning or whenever it is and think, "I don't know, maybe they just need someone to lean on. Maybe I should invite them out for a cup of coffee during the week". Maybe during the week you could think about someone. Maybe you could pick up the phone and call them. Can I suggest that each one of us make it a priority to build at least one or two close friendships in the family of God?

It's the little things – the phone calls, the words of encouragement, the prayers. If you



If you believe that God
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people for whom He has
custom made your fruit?

.....

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believe that God has planted you in this family, will you also believe that He will lead you to people for whom He has custom made your fruit?

We need to be committed in order to flourish. We need to have the courage to stop judging, to set ourselves free from the weaknesses of other people. We need to have practical acts of love going on according to the natural gifts and talents and abilities and desires that God has given us.

No - it won't always be convenient, the flesh won't always like it, and probably, you know, we'll get hurt more along the way. But will you be part of this community, this fellowship ... for Christ's sake? Will you go to the House of the Lord, put your roots down and flourish where God has planted you?

TIME TO PRAY

Let's pray

I know that God has brought us together in this short booklet to do a powerful work in our hearts through His Word. And perhaps you're someone who's struggling a bit with this whole 'church' thing. It's so easy to be overwhelmed by what appear to be all these negatives in church.

My hunch is that just about everyone who's part of a church could quickly rattle off a list of the negatives long enough to justify opting out, or at the very least being pot-bound. And yet, stop and think about it. It doesn't matter what community we're part of – a family, a football club, at work – there are always going to be some negatives. There are always going to be some people there that we don't naturally get on with, and still others who have the ability to drive us nuts!

And it is in the middle of that blindingly, glimpsingly obvious reality that God's plan is for you and for me to flourish in His House – His church. Despite the negatives. Right in the middle of all those negatives in fact!

And to do that, I would invite you to join me in this prayer:

Father God, it's such a blessing for us to know that You know the deepest things in our hearts. You know the hurts; You know the fears; You know the things that drive us nuts some days and You know the struggles we're having with church.

Father, I pray right now that You would pour out the healing balm of Your Spirit upon us; I pray that You would still our hearts and heal our souls; and I pray that You would speak to us through Your Word today and guide us into the place where You would have us be. For some, perhaps for most, that's about flourishing right where we are. And maybe for others, it's time to find a new fellowship, the place where You would have them be. Show us Father, Your will, in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Berni Dymet is a contemporary Christian communicator with a passion for sharing the Good News of Jesus right into the middle of life. He comes from the perspective that this Christianity thing - it isn't just a faith that lives in our heads or even our hearts, but that it actually works right here in the middle of our lives.

Christianity actually works when we dare to accept Jesus Christ into our lives!! Not just as Saviour, but also as Lord.

Millions of people around the globe tune into Berni's radio programs each week. The Lord has given him a special gift for sharing the Gospel in a truly practical way. In a way that really connects into the hearts and lives of real people in real places, transforming their lives. That's what the ministry of Christianityworks is all about. Leading people into a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ.

But Berni's passion, his enthusiasm and his insights into the day to day realities of life are simply tools in God's hands. The real change agent is God Himself.

And to Him - and Him alone - be all the glory.

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Berni Dymet

Flourishing in the House of the Lord

A lot of people have a lot of problems with “church”. So what is it? What does God mean for it to be? And can it have a positive role to play not just in society, but in our lives? As difficult and challenging as it can be sometimes to be part of this thing called “church” God’s plan for each one of us, is that we should *flourish in the house of the Lord*.

Join Berni Dymet in this booklet – *The Problem with Church Is ...* – as he opens God’s Word to discover what church is meant to be.

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