

Urbana 96 - What Did God Do

by George Verwer

George Verwer's sermon at Urbana 96 emphasizes the importance of commitment to global missions and the transformative power of prayer and community engagement.

Duration: 38:46

Scripture: Matthew 28:19, John 14:6, Acts 13:2

Topics: "Lordship Of Christ", "Mission Mobilization"

Description

The video mentioned in the sermon transcript is titled 'Lordship of Christ' and was recorded at Urbana 87. The speaker, who is not named, talks about receiving permission to give a standing invitation during the fourth night of the event. They also mention being asked to be more serious in their next message. The speaker reflects on the impact of their previous videos and their plans to be a mission mobilizer on their campus.

Transcript

Well, it's great to be back. It was just about a year ago I came back from Argentina and shared about Acts 13. Let's start that again.

Praise the Lord. It's good to push the wrong buttons. Red one for record.

It's great to be back. It was just about a year ago that I came back from Argentina just at this time and shared about Acts 13. And it's amazing as I go around to find out, it's been of course slower than I would have dreamed, but to find out how many people are taking on this Acts 13 vision.

And I have people come up all the time and write to me and say, our church is now going to send at least someone. Many, many churches that have not sent out missionaries are now contemplating and attempting to send out someone. And sometimes it's a result of the Acts 13 vision, which I would be happy to send anyone more information about.

But the main purpose of this time is to share about Urbana. And I want to first of all thank you for praying. It was a one-year struggle and somewhat of an agony for me, if I'm honest.

It's not my favorite kind of thing, especially to submit manuscripts. And some of you remember the work we put into that, not just me, but others. And as some of you guessed, we never did actually use that manuscript.

Maybe that will end up going into a book. But somehow I had the strength to just share from my heart. God had met me in a very real way here in London, on the train or the tube going to Randy Lowler's team working among Muslims, and had given me what I felt was just the core of what I should share at Urbana, at least on the first night, and gave me the faith just to leave the second night until I could see what God was doing, because it was the fourth evening, see what God was doing through all the other speakers and through all that was happening there.

So it was certainly a momentous occasion when finally, after a year of thinking and praying and orientation, I stood in front of this great crowd and just let loose. I guess people would classify it as a bit over the top on the first night. I wore this hat, my global jacket.

By the way, the OMers have the jackets with the signs on the back. I didn't have one of those. And they had over 1,500 people sign cards at the OM stall for follow-up just about OM.

And I estimate that if we follow through with vision and strength and prayer, which is one of the main purposes of this tape, we like to think of this as a prayer tape, then I believe we're going to see a lot of people for global action. And I think every mission agency there, huge numbers of mission agencies, huge giant gymnasiums filled with exhibitions, are going to see recruits from Urbana. I think the bonding with this crowd was very easy.

They were hungry, they were prepared, and there were a lot of laughs and there was a lot of things that might be considered a little bit unusual by the older generation. But it was received well, and I then prepared for, of course, the criticisms that often come from older people or leaders about this particular approach to communication. But somehow it didn't come.

Dan did take me aside with, I guess it was Paula, just to talk about the fourth night. And I asked for permission to give a standing invitation, to stand up, not just to fill out papers. That has not always been considered acceptable in the past at Urbana.

But they gave me that permission, and the only exhortation they had was that they felt in my next message perhaps I could be a little more serious, telling George Borer to be more serious, like instructing dinosaurs how to eat. But I decided I would attempt to be more serious on the fourth night. It's not possible for me to describe that fourth night and some of the wild things that I still did in a more serious note.

But no doubt those two videos will be going all over the globe in the next few years. I talked to more people through the Lordship of Christ video from Urbana 87 than probably I spoke at Urbana. Who knows? But that video continues ten years later to be widely circulated.

Let me share that which I've just received by fax as I talked to Melanie Hanson and just wanted to get the official press release and just some of the official material that's going out around the world because some of you I know haven't seen this. Press release, this is way back January 9th. As a result of how God moved at Urbana, 96,000 students from across North America have committed themselves to cross-cultural missions and are beginning to consider their next steps in the fulfillment, in fulfilling these commitments.

These are written commitments. A woman led the sort of printed written commitment forms after I finished speaking on that fourth night and gave the invitation. About one-fourth of the whole audience stood when I gave the invitation for radical commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, His Lordship and world missions.

I might just say, at the beginning of the meeting I asked how many were already, before they came to Urbana, trying to get to the mission field and thousands stood. That's something very important. What we've been saying here over the past year has been proven true at Urbana.

There is no, in one sense, lack of people wanting to go to the mission field. There is a lack of funds and facility and many other things that are needed to make it happen. But the initial volunteer stage is certainly not the biggest obstacle or the biggest problem.

Let me get back to this text. Urbana, 96, sponsored by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship USA and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship Canada through more than 19,000 students. This is not an exaggerated or blown up statistic.

This is on paper. These people registered. They were there.

The main auditorium only takes a little over 17,000. So many had to, through a system of alphabet, go to the overflow auditorium in order to be there. Many of our own OM reps, in order to get a more inexpensive rate, I don't really know why we do that, they don't even go to the main auditorium meetings.

They go to some of them. They're mainly in the exhibition hall and meeting with individuals all the time. Drew more than 19,000 students, missionaries and others.

And I heard and understood it was about 900 pastors in a pastor's track led by Gordon MacDonald. To the campus of the University of Illinois, by the way, we had mild weather but lots of fog. Quite a bit of chaos, people getting there with planes cancelled.

We got in just before the fog, which is good because I was speaking on the opening night. From December 27th to the 31st. I might just throw in right here in the beginning that one of the highlights was breaking bread with 18,000 to 19,000 people on New Year's Eve.

It took a long time. But it was a time of meditation. It was a time of heart searching.

As we followed sometimes the people who took the wine and took the cup and took the bread and distributed it through this huge stadium. They did it in a very orderly way and that was how we brought 1997 into our lives. Mission agencies and Bible school representatives reported their days being filled with interviews of young men and women eager to make specific contributions to the world mission of the church.

Again, one of the highlights of Urbana is all the personal interaction. The breakthrough at Urbana came not because of any one person or one group of person but a massive army of people interacting with students sometimes on into the night. The small groups, especially focusing on the unreached people and the Joshua Project alone was just quite a phenomenal event.

15,857 delegates turned in Urbana 96 decision cards. Over 15,000, close to 16,000 turned in cards as an expression of their commitment made at the convention. More decision cards are expected to be turned in delegates in the coming days.

We've only seen the tip of the iceberg in terms of everything God has done at Urbana 96, says Urbana 96 director Dan Harrison. The statistics from the decision cards are an incomplete measurement of everything that went on during Urbana but they do give some indication of the depth of delegate interest

and where we expect to see impact as a result of their time here. For example, about 2,750 delegates declared their intent to pursue cross-cultural missions this summer and another 2,000 indicated plans to go on short-term mission projects at a later date and 2,867 indicated they would pursue missions as a life work.

That's a key statistic, almost 3,000, missions as a life work. With 2,228 prepared to make one or two year commitments. 7,861 indicated they would clarify how and when they would pursue mission involvement.

9,000 committed themselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. 180, lost that page now, I think that 180 statistic, the number of people who actually made a decision to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for the first time. I've actually got the original page that was given out at the press conference and probably has changed a little since then but at that time 157 had indicated believing on Christ.

I was asked, I guess together with others to make sure, even though the whole thrust was world missions, that I included the gospel and an opportunity for people to come to Christ because non-Christians do go to Urbana. Well, that gives you just some of the statistics. I think it might be of interest, however, especially as many of you listening to this tape are Christian workers, to get a little of the background.

They took a survey on probability of mission service, 14% definite, 33% probable, 38% unsure, 7% unlikely, 1.5% none, 5% no answer. They did a survey and I might say one of the great days at Urbana was the day of racial reconciliation which is an important theme in the body of Christ at this time around the world. They had a couple thousand after the main morning.

Morning was all plenaries. A much fuller and more intensive schedule than any OM conference I can assure you, at least that I've been to except maybe if I went back to the 60s. They just feel these people out there and so it's really from early morning to late at night every single day and even on that final day they seem to be so receptive.

But they did a little survey. Who was at Urbana in terms of racial background? And this has some negative and positive factors. 64% white, 20% Asian, 2.28% African.

There was a major Afro-American conference going on at the same time down in Atlanta. That's a factor. 2.34% Asian-Korean, 1.90% Hispanic, 7% others.

57% female, 43% male. Shows the women are still ahead but at least the men are somewhat in range. Very interesting statistics about what their campus relationship.

I was just talking with Melody Hanson on the phone on how we could increase mission emphasis in the actual InterVarsity chapter since this is an InterVarsity event. 8,700 people listed nothing in terms of campus fellowship. 5,200 InterVarsity, 1,500 other.

564 Campus Crusade. They had many regional conferences going on around this time of the year. 485 local Christian college mission groups.

407 InterVarsity Canada, 282 Fellowship of Christian Athletes, 182 Navigators, 153 Young Life, 137 Baptist Student Unions. By the way, in American campuses, for those of you who are not Americans, there are often many different student movements, not just one. And then there's one or two other listings there.

This might be of interest to you. Educational level, 5% 12th grade, 13% college freshman, 22% college sophomore, 22% college junior, 26% college senior, 8% master's level grad student, 3% doctorate level grad student, 1% postdoctoral grad student. 116 nations represented at Urbana 1996.

I've got some amazing feedback just from individuals, because it's always good to hear what students have to say, and I thought I would read just a few of these about witness. What are one or two things that God has taught me at Urbana? How about 30 or 40? God has been teaching me about his character, my sinfulness, his name, my future. I'm committed to praying for two of my non-Christian friends more regularly.

I want to be more intentional in my witness to them. And that is so typical at many at Urbana. I think a huge number of people made commitments in connection with prayer.

And there was quite an emphasis on prayer, even in the main meeting, when it's so hard with such a huge crowd. And somehow a number of people brought this feedback that these young people, they want to pray. They want to be involved in prayer.

We had a lunch, a prayer and fasting lunch, which was very, very encouraging and released an enormous amount of finance into missions. Let me just give you that information. 90,000 was raised for world hunger relief.

90,000. These people already paid a lot of money to get there. Through a skip-a-lunch effort on December 29th.

More than \$285,000 was also given toward world hunger. That's another offering on December 30th. And then another offering of \$160,000 was given to support pioneer student work through International Fellowship of Evangelical Students.

Lindsay Brown seemed to just show up on the last day. Other conferences took place right after Urbana. And others intend to give to IFES on a very, very regular basis.

What an encouragement. What an encouragement. Many feel that Urbana broke the stereotypes concerning the X generation, which is a big thing in American vocabulary and thinking.

And people have been at a number of Urbanas. This was my third Urbana. I was in 67.

I got referred to a number of times and some interesting pictures going around. And then I was there in 87. This, by the way, was a celebration of the 50th year.

And one of the speakers sharing the night that I spoke, the opening night, was Christy Wilson, who in his early 20s was the leader and the organizer of the first Urbana in Toronto, Canada. You can imagine the response that he had. And then Betty Elliott, who was involved way back.

A whole group of people had come together and they were sitting in a special section who had been in Urbana back in those early days, of course, including missionaries returning from the field. So that was quite amazing. Let me read a few others.

God has renewed and stretched my heart for missions. He really convicted me to be radical in my witness to my sorority sisters. He also convicted me of the need to be specific and sacrificial in my commitment to missions.

Another one. God taught me that if I really care about my friends, I won't accept their religion with quiet tolerance. And it was very bold at Urbana, the challenge that Jesus Christ is the only way.

If there's any area where the church is hedging and pussyfooting, it is in that area. But we had an Indian brother share specifically on that. One of the highlights of Urbana was that he began to choke and was unable to speak.

The same thing happened to the person who shared that message previously. Urbana now has a very strong emphasis on intercession going on the whole time. There are intercessors meeting privately, interceding, led by an outstanding woman, Mary Ann, a missionary to Latin America, who we had good fellowship with.

And when this started to happen in front of all these people, main stage, I think it was on the third night, Dan went up and, of course, brought him some water. That didn't seem to help. And I saw Mary Ann praying there behind the stage, people praying with her.

The students just really respond to that. This generation of students, I think, respond more when people are in trouble. People that look like they have it all together, I don't think that's what really excites this generation.

I'm sure there's some exceptions. Maybe that's why I get such a great response. They just look at me.

They know this guy's in big trouble. So I get a lot of heart vibrations. But they really rallied in prayer.

And some feel this was the miracle of Urbana as his voice came back strong and he finished preaching this message, this message on the exclusiveness of Christ and Jesus Christ as the only way. Here's another one. God showed me that he has a place for me in inner city missions and taught me the true importance of living among the poor, I would strongly emphasize, being reached out to and fully understanding their culture.

I also desire to follow God closely and soak up his word. A huge traditional emphasis generally found in inner varsity on the word of God. Jorge, George Antianza, the main Bible speaker, giving the Bible readings in the morning, following in the steps of men like John Stock and Ajit Fernando.

I think everyone could see that he was struggling. This was not his first language. He's a Spanish speaker in all these notes.

But the message was good and people responded and on the final morning, he spoke through his wife, an American, through interpretation. And you could see that he was a lot more free. This brother has such a powerful smile.

He didn't really need to preach. He just got up there, and there were these big screens. Most people watch this on a big screen.

Five big screens. You're just a little, especially if you're small like me. I did bring my binoculars, but most people didn't have binoculars.

You can hardly see the speaker. I went up to what they call the nosebleed section. On the final night, I was up there walking around.

That actually almost led to riots and I had to leave. But it's so amazing to just sit up there and see the whole auditorium. But this brother would just give this smile and he would really just radiate the Lord Jesus.

So God used him as each morning he expounded from the word of God from the book of Acts. A couple of other quotes from participants. God taught me that I'll never be good enough to be a missionary, but rather the sacrifice of Christ will be my hope to do his work.

Another one. I learned from Libby Little's talk that missions is not glorious and that if God calls me to that long term, then there will be much sacrifice, but that sacrifice, no matter how costly, is nothing in comparison to how richly God blesses. I have committed myself to God as Lord seriously.

I told God I'm willing to obey him. He has absolute authority over me. I've committed my summer to his service.

I will also inspire my church and campus. For world missions. Another one.

I learned that there's an abundant blessing in my life that I have treated as downfalls. In my own message, I shared a lot about God's grace to ragamuffins. That word became a major word at Urbana.

People had ragamuffin buttons on, ragamuffin books were sold, and everybody knew who was the ultimate ragamuffin when I got up and spoke again. On the fourth evening, we emphasized a lot God being able to use failures. And everybody knew who was the ultimate ragamuffin when I got up and spoke again.

On the fourth evening, we emphasized a lot God being able to use failures. So here's a feedback that's tied into that. God is not calling me to fire missions at this time, but he's calling me to love his young people of America as their teacher in public schools.

I plan on being a mission mobilizer more on my campus. That was another arrow that we shot. Normally in this kind of meeting, by the way, you don't always get a lot of freedom for book pushes, but they have a book of the day, and that is featured on video on the big screen, and those books just go out.

Operation World was a book of the day. Last minute, I was able to print a special edition in Chicago, priority one. 5,000 copies.

We decided just to give those away. They all went. Nate here was involved in that.

My book, somehow, No Turning Back, was the book of the day. It's available at the doors of the auditorium. They went out.

One of the highlights at Urbana, of course, was worship. They did not have special music numbers at Urbana. Again, the program is so packed, but they had powerful worship with a very, very live band who really knew how to lead worship, and the times of worship.

Again, I thought it was so good because sometimes the worship sessions get a little too long, but to me, they had God's mind about the timing, how long, and they had it, of course, in different intervals. Another highlight at Urbana was a young man, an actor named Bruce Cone. Is that pronouncing his name right, Nate? Cone.

Bruce did a dramatization of the Bible reading. Every morning before George or Jorge spoke, he dramatized a reading from the Book of Acts, and he was brilliant. If you ever get the opportunity to see that video, it's just quite amazing.

Again, audience participation is so powerful when there's a healing from the Book of Acts. Just the way he gave the word, he had it, of course, all completely memorized. I refer in a vague way to someone because the country they come from is a high security area, the land of Afghanistan, but this married woman who had, I believe, been touched in Urbana years ago was a missionary.

In fact, a missionary from that country wrote me, make sure I got to see her, and she spoke in one of the morning sessions toward the end. Absolute opposite of my approach. Very, very quiet, serious woman, and shared about living in Kabul, Afghanistan, and it was awesome.

What she shared could be as relevant in the 60s, 70s, 50s, 70s, 80s, as it was in the 90s, and it is a proof, again, that we don't have to be intimidated. We don't have to try to be someone else when we're sharing the missionary vision. If we've got something in our heart, if God's done something in our life, we can just share whatever way that we share, and God just mightily used that woman in all of our hearts, and I tell you, the Muslim world and the 1040 window and the unreached people, I believe, got a greater challenge at Urbana than certainly most mission conferences, many that I have ever been to, so that is also a big item of praise.

One of the prayer requests that we want you to especially take to the Lord is concerning what's happened on the World Wide Web. Many people listen to this live on their computer. This has never happened before at Urbana because, maybe it did happen three years ago, I don't remember hearing about it, but this is certainly a major thing today.

If you want the website of Urbana, it's www.urbana.org and I'll just repeat that for those of you who are getting this tape because there is so much on the Urbana website that could be of an enormous blessing and those of you here tonight, it's just amazing what you can get about what God has done there, challenges about the future, possibilities to interact, so it's www.urbana.org and that will get you unlimited exposure on Urbana for all of you especially who missed it. By the way, there were a lot of people turned down as it was fully booked weeks before the event and many, many disappointed people were not able to get there. We hope they will be able to get in on this through email, through the video cassettes, audio cassettes, all of which have already gone out in considerable quantity.

By the way, about 2,700 people made a commitment to be more involved in student witness and I think we need to understand it's not easy for these students to witness in their universities. Some universities even here in Britain, people who are attempting to witness are being mocked, they're being attacked sometimes for their position on abortion or on homosexuality, huge complexity, one of the most highly attended special sessions and all kinds of special sessions, you can't imagine it, was for those that wanted sexual healing. 2,000 came to that session.

One of the powerful testimonies from a young man who I think had been on OM but was mainly from Wheaton College, he shared about the mini revival that came at Wheaton about a year or two ago and 1,000 to 1,500 stayed after that meeting to pray that kind of confessional prayer and to get right with God and to repent. So that was another emphasis that really, really flowed. Another thing that impressed me about Urbana and whenever I go to these events I'm always studying and trying to learn people of different racial backgrounds, a tremendous mixture of people of different national backgrounds.

The brother each day who really helped lead in the prayer was a Korean brother. Just a very, very strong communicator. And the number of women, different backgrounds of those women who shared main stage.

And it was really, it was really beautiful and the Holy Spirit used that in a very, very powerful way. Another group of people, about 2,254 people made a commitment to get more involved in missions focus in their own church and that's another prayer request because some university students are not really with it when it comes to the church. And we tried to bring this out in the message.

The importance of local church and Acts 13 sending out workers into the harvest field. There's so much more I would love to share but I think we've got more than enough here that we could take to God in prayer. I had this other little item asking special prayer for follow up.

Wondering what tools to use to follow up your students who attended Urbana. Maximize material they already have. By the way, everybody got a Urbana Bible.

19,000 Bibles went out in a special cover. I mean, the amount of literature and that's a real prayer request because these students are already on information overload praying that this literature doesn't just get laid aside and buried by all their university studies. Let me finish reading that.

Maximize the material they already have. Encourage them to read through next steps. Everybody received a copy of that volume one which delegates received in their Urbana bag.

It's a booklet of reflections on life at Urbana 96. Its goals are to encourage, help fulfill the decisions made at the convention to offer new ideas. Delegates will receive volume two in early March.

Also encourage them to visit the Urbana website which I already gave you. Here's another little article that's gone out to the press. Exer students at Urbana shatter stereotypes.

Over and over again missionaries and exhibitors at Urbana 96 said how impressed they were with the high caliber of students at this convention. They said students were asking good questions. Were seriously considering the cost of commitment to missions.

Were already taking steps toward involvement while at the convention. Mission agencies and bible school representatives reported their days being filled with interviews of young women and men eager to make specific contributions to the world mission of the church. One of the things I kept saying to people and especially when I had a radio interview is we really do need an Urbana for adults.

I was so privileged to be able to speak at this event and I counted it a privilege to bring in my strong appeal for sending and that came across and people responded to that. I gave, I think, I can't even remember perfectly what I shared but I think I managed to squeeze in this battle against the clock. They did give me a few extra minutes or I took them or something but the new hero, the fellow that stays home and helps supply the money.

That concept is foreign to many young people and I really believe we are going to see the release of finance directly and indirectly from Urbana though with many of these people it will be a while. So that's another prayer request that we can remember their parents. Some of these people when they share with their parents that they're thinking about becoming a missionary.

Many parents are not Christians. They are going to have a very difficult time. So of course the Grace Awakening challenge came right through what we were attempting to share.

By the way, I finally, after several years of praying, I made a deal with the publisher to do our own edition of Grace Awakening and instead of \$22 a copy, the present hardback price in America, I'm going to be able to buy 10,000 copies at \$1.31. It cannot be sold in bookstores. It will be the student missionary special edition with the cheap kind of paper they're using in Bulgaria. But if you're going to give a lot of them away, I don't think we need to worry about that.

And certainly the Grace Awakening challenge came strongly through there at Urbana. So pray that as they share with their churches, they share with their parents. We pushed Betty Bartlett's book on friend-raising as they realize how difficult it is to raise funds.

We pushed also the challenge of tent-making. And that was, the tent-making booth was one of the busiest booths. And a lot of these students, they are thinking more of how they can be a tent-maker.

They're career people. So that's something else we can incorporate into our praying. Again, I want to thank every one of you either here tonight or out listening to this cassette who have prayed for Urbana, prayed for me personally.

I want to also encourage you again to get into the website or to get some of the cassettes and through distributing those cassettes, video and audio cassettes, you can spread the vision. Not firstly of Urbana, the vision of reaching the entire world with the gospel. We try to emphasize our burden isn't just to evangelize the world, but it's to build a kingdom everywhere.

That means all these students back in their universities and many about a thousand missionaries and exhibitors were there. They're building a kingdom right now and we are as we go back to prayer in this prayer meeting. Let's pray.

Lord, I just thank you for this awesome event there in Urbana three weeks ago. And as the message goes out through people's lives and by cassette and video and through the World Wide Web, we ask that this may be brought into this huge stream of missionary vision and motivation that's going on across the world right now. We thank you for that telephone link up with a missions event down in Panama and the missions event in Mexico.

We thank you that so many organizations and so many leaders of different organizations were involved with this. And for the balance of truth that was shared in the midst of a conference that was especially focusing on world missions. We pray that many, many leaders in America who are not emphasizing world missions, many pastors who don't even allow time in their pulpit for missionary speakers to any degree, that many of the people who are considered the shakers and movers in the United States and other nations in Canada will somehow through what they hear about Urbana decide to become proactive and to really begin to build sending churches.

Lord, unless we see sending churches, unless we see finance, even in terms of all we want to do in the follow-up task, then we know many of those who made this commitment will never go. Many of them will never even go short term. We haven't time, oh God, we haven't had time tonight, oh God, to emphasize the opposition, the complexities, the heartaches, the fiery darts of Satan which we've seen coming even since we walked out of that great auditorium.

And so we pray there may continue to be an ongoing sense that for most people or many people Urbana was just the beginning or just one more step in their ongoing dynamic and revolutionary walk for you. We pray for those that went away hurt or disappointed, for those that had deep emotional struggles and maybe didn't get the counseling or help that they wanted. Or for those that stood up but now their emotions are down or they're depressed and they feel in a time of confusion.

May they somehow come and bring this whole thing into perspective and may that message of your ragamuffin grace and your ability to use failures come back to them at their moment of need. And Lord we pray for Dan Harrison as he now moves on from intervarsity and goes into a different ministry as he has several major open doors. And we pray that you lead and guide him and his family and all those who are and were involved in the organizational side of this event.

Lord how we thank you for so many hundreds that were behind the scenes in the offices and in the organizational side that made this happen. And we commit them to you, especially our sister Paula, and ask that they would be strengthened as they now move into the next phase of their ministry. And Lord we would give this heart cry again for the parents, the mothers and fathers of those who are at Urbana, that somehow they would be able to understand the importance of biblical action.

And if they're not Christians, may they realize that you Lord Jesus are the way, the truth and the light and there is no other way. And may we hear of parents and friends all over the globe coming to know you because of the ongoing impact of this huge event and all that's come out from it. We ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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