LIFE GROUPS



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VISION FOR MORE TO LIFE CAMPAIGN

In 2018, we are looking to facilitate journeys with people exploring, or interested in exploring, God's existence and what that means for them, the church, and the world.

These Life Groups will give us the opportunity to invite friends and family who don't know Jesus to come and investigate him in a non-threatening, community-rich environment.

It will hopefully also motivate and encourage those who come to our Sunday meetings, but who are not yet in a small group, to join in a group for the duration of the campaign.

We believe that small groups are a wonderful expression of spiritual community and the place for people to belong. Our 'More To Life' campaign provides an opportunity for the multiplying and starting up of many new groups. Some of these temporary Life Groups may go on to become permanent small groups (what better time to start a new small group than with a new influx of new people and excitement about small groups).

It also serves as an easy introduction to small group hosting/leading, and therefore attracts many more to give small group hosting/leading a try.

Finally, we also feel it will be a fresh boost in motivation and momentum for our current small groups at the start of a new year, when our energy levels are naturally high.

The content in this campaign is extremely Christ-centered and aims to answer some key questions about the faith and also what Jesus, himself, says to these topics/questions. As such, we believe this is a key series to learn about Jesus, and, as we journey through this material, to allow him to inspire and change us.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A LIFE GROUP HOST?

A quick explanation:

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TEMPORARY AND PERMANENT GROUPS?

At the moment, every current small group in Common Ground is a permanent group. These groups have small group leaders and have committed people in them. The Life Groups you all will be launching will be temporary groups.

Yet, it's helpful to know that for the duration of the series our permanent small groups will also be following the same material and structure as the Life Groups.

This means everyone will be on the same journey. Because we are wanting to create a space for people to look into Christianity and church, what we're saying to our Hosts is, 'If you have friends that you'd like to invite to a group that will help them discover Jesus in a non-pressured setting' then why not host a group and invite them?" Notice that permanent small groups have leaders who have been trained up to shepherd and lead their groups, whereas temporary Life Groups will have hosts. This is less of a demanding role, and requires less qualifications. So that's the difference between our current small groups and the Life Groups we will be launching for this campaign series!

A SMALL GROUP LEADER DOES EVERYTHING A HOST OF LIFE GROUP DOES, BUT IN ADDITION HE/SHE....

- 1) has been trained as a small group leader,
- 2) is committed for the long-haul, and
- 3) assumes a 24/7 shepherding role in the lives of the group.

SO, WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME TO BE A HOST?

A HOST IS SOMEONE WHO...

- H Heart for People
- 0 Open your Home
- S Serve a Snack
- T Turn on your Screen

H - HEART FOR PEOPLE



BE REAL

As the leader you don't have to have it all together. The more real you are about your struggles, the more real the people will be too.

CARE FOR THE PEOPLE

This group is not about you, but instead about them. People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Pursue people in the group who didn't come and tell them you missed them. Encourage people as you see them growing. Be gracious to those who disappoint you. Invite everyone to come to church with you. And once the journey is over, keep the friendship going.

PERSEVERE THROUGH DISAPPOINTMENT

It is really hard when people either don't arrive, or don't seem open to building friendships or spiritually learning. Persevere. Keep praying for everyone in the group. Keep praying to God for strength and wisdom. 'Do not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time you will reap a harvest if you do not give up.' [Galatians 6:9]. Remain buoyant. You cannot afford to be discouraged by someone who doesn't turn up – focus on those who do come.

CELEBRATE THE JOURNEY TOGETHER BY HAVING A WEEK 6 CELEBRATION

On week 5 and 6 say, 'I know the Life Group journey ends on week 7, so let's make week 7 a Celebration night. Let's celebrate insights gleaned, lives changed and relationships formed. Let's celebrate by having a 3-course meal (or at least a full meal). And sometime in the meal, we will make space for anyone who wants to, to share what the Life Group journey has meant to them. Let's have fun!'

O - OPEN YOUR HOME



"Some folks make you feel at home. Others make you wish you were." Arnold H. Glasow

Being hospitable is the act of making others feel as though they were in their own homes—only better. It's the little things that count, and it all stems from the heart. It is simply aiming to welcome guests in a friendly manner and showing genuine care for their comfort.

HERE ARE A FEW BASIC HOSPITALITY TIPS

- Be prepared for the evening. Put out cups and coffee/tea stuff before people arrive. Make sure you have sent reminders to everyone about where you are meeting, the location pin and given your phone number so they can call if they get lost.
- If you have children, prep yourselves and your kids in advance so they are either in bed or settled ahead of guests arriving. If guests are bringing their children with them, try to include your children in the hosting process (as age appropriate). Hosting children well will make their parents feel more comfortable.
- + Be relaxed. New groups of people that have never met can feel a little quiet when everyone starts arriving. The silence can be awkward, background music and a cozy lounge can go a long way to make the ambience welcoming.
- Greet everyone as they arrive and introduce people to each other straight away (don't wait for everyone to arrive to start asking questions about them – you can just get everyone to answer those questions again).
- + Ask questions immediately but in a conversational way about what they do and how their day has been and try get them talking to each other too.
- + Build a relational bridge with people This allows for deeper conversation as well as modelling for others in the group how to include others.
- Work to find common ground with people so that everyone feels like they can connect with others – especially when considering cultural diversity. Focus on what you have in common, not what makes you different.
- + Lead the meeting informally but make sure people have expectations on what is going to happen during the evening, what time it will finish etc.





WE ALL KNOW THAT PEOPLE CONNECT BEST OVER FOOD!

- The goal is to help people feel 'at home', so choose food/snacks that people from a range of backgrounds will find normal or typical (i.e. avoid exotic foods). Try keep it at a level that various socio-economic backgrounds will feel comfortable contributing.
- Try and have tea and coffee ready for people to be able to serve themselves/ and each other to facilitate mingling and give people something for them to do while they wait.
- + It is important that everything is ready upon arrival so that the night does not end too late. This is a great time for connecting.
- Don't forget to celebrate the final evening together (week 7) by having a 3-course meal (or a full meal). Again, please be mindful that different people can afford different types of food. Keep it appropriate so everyone feels comfortable.
- + Keep the tone of this night celebratory!

T - TURN ON YOUR SCREEN



WHAT CONTENT WILL BE COVERED?

We're asking small group leaders/hosts to model and mobilize others to explore/investigate what it means to follow Jesus in two ways simultaneously:

1) In Life Groups, we'll watch and discuss 6 Alpha videos. These are brilliant, culture-engaging videos looking at some big questions people have about the Christian faith and God. (It will be worth acknowledging that these videos were created in the UK, and that some of the applications, examples and terminology might need to be 'translated' into our context. By acknowledging this to the group, it may help prevent some pushback to the material because it is not South African. Encourage people to make the 'translation' to our culture and context for themselves.)

2) Here's a summary of each week's content:

| WEEK | SUNDAY MESSAGE TITLE | LIFE GROUP CONTENT ALPHA DVD TITLE |
|------|--|--|
| 1 | N/A | Campaign Launch in homes: Is there more to life? 6/7/8th Feb |
| 2 | What Jesus said about life (John 3&4) 11th Feb | Who was Jesus? 13/14/15th Feb |
| 3 | What Jesus said about himself (John 8 and the I Am's) 18th Feb | Why did Jesus have to die? 20/21/22nd Feb |
| 4 | What Jesus said about his death (John 12:20-36) 25th Feb | How can I have faith? 27/28/29th Feb |
| 5 | What Jesus said about suffering (John 9 – Start of John 10) 4th March | How can I resist evil? 6/7/8th March |
| 6 | What Jesus said about the Holy Spirit (John 14:12-31) 11th March | Who is the Holy Spirit? 13/14/15th March |
| 6 | Saturday: 17th March What does the Holy Spirit do? How can I be filled? | |
| 7 | What Jesus said about his church (John 20. Mission.Presence.Message) 18th March | Celebration Dinner 20/21*/22 March |

*note that the 21st March is a holiday, but still a great day to have the celebration dinner. For questions relating to each night's content refer to the last section of this training manual.

HOW DOES THIS ALL WORK?

1. WHAT HAPPENS IN A LIFE GROUP?

The general flow is the following:

- + SNACK TIME: 15 30 min This is a great time for connecting.
- + DVD TIME: 25 30 min Watch the ALPHA DVD.
- + CONVERSATION TIME: 30-45 min based on questions we provide. This time allows people to reveal where they are spiritually, ask questions, share contributions and learn together. The questions are generally open-ended in order to spark conversation. We have provided you with some suggestions but feel free to adjust to your group if you feel you can improve on them.
- + **PRAYER TIME: 5-min -** At the end the group prays. In the first few weeks we suggest just one to two people pray (maybe pre-ask 1-2 people), but by the end we gently coach more people to pray aloud. However, it is imperative that no one is pressured to pray!
- + WRAP UP AND REMINDERS: 3-min reminder time where announcements and planning happens.

2. WHEN DO GROUPS MEET?

Most groups will meet on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday night, 7-9pm (this is currently the same time that the permanent small groups are meeting), although meeting times are not limited to these days or times.

Some groups will meet in a 1-hour lunch break at a place of work, or perhaps an hour before work. For this to be effective, we recommend that the snack and the ALPHA DVD happen at the same time. And conversation and prayer time need to be kept to a minimum.

Some groups, particularly if there are lots of families of kids involved, could meet on a Sunday. Everyone can gather for lunch, then take rostered turns watching over all the kids (better yet the group can chip in for a babysitter or two), while the rest watch and discuss the DVD.

Be aware that some folks might struggle with transport to and from the group – and finding lifts within the group may be necessary.

In summary, anytime you can get people together is just fine!

3. HOW TO INVITE PEOPLE TO COME TO YOUR GROUP?

(Note: This is the main vehicle to fill groups – people are more likely to come with a personal invitation!)

As Hosts, you must do the important work of inviting people. In addition to this do your best to mobilize people in your group to do the same. Remember that though some people may say 'no', still many people, if asked respectfully, will say 'yes'. The invitation process looks something like this:

1) Think about all the people who don't know Jesus that you have a relationship with and whom you could invite. List them in order of the ones who are most likely to say yes to least likely to say yes, and invite them in that order (it's the principle of picking the low-hanging fruit first).

2) Reconnect with them socially if you haven't recently.

- 3) Pray for these people, asking God for a natural opportunity to invite them.
- 4) Invite them by saying or emailing words to the effect of...

'Hi. Starting February, my church, Common Ground, is exploring the Christian faith in a series answering the question 'Is there More To Life?'. We're also expecting 100s of people who don't normally go to church, but are interested in answering the question, "Is there more to life?" to join us in this. Maybe you'd like to come. I think you'll find it really interesting. It is non-threatening and really informative. On Sundays, we're looking at what Jesus said about himself and life. And in smaller groups meeting in homes (I am running one!) we are going through the Alpha DVD's. These DVD's aim to answer some core questions people have about Jesus and what he claimed. It's really great material to go through, regardless of what we believe or how we have lived, or whether we are seasoned followers of Jesus, or just looking in trying to make sense of it. Check out more details on the invite. Let me know if you're interested – perhaps you can come on Sundays, or perhaps to my group mid-week, or perhaps to both.'

(Note that some people will only want to come to the Sundays. That's still great. Others will only want to come to small groups. That's also great. Either way they will be exposed to the life-changing message of Jesus!)

In addition to the above invite strategy, be sure to also look around on Sundays during our gathering times. About 45% of the adults you see are not connected to a small group. They are the people most likely to come to your group. Move in on them with warmth, and an invitation to come to your group.

4. HELPING SCEPTICS AND SEEKERS IN YOUR GROUP

Most of our experience in church-based small groups is to have a group of Christians together. But all that changes when there are not-yet Christians in the room too. That's why we need to work really hard to not intimidate or exclude these people, or make them feel 'out' or like they don't belong. But how can this be done? There are 6 ways...

1) The average non-Christian assumes that church-going Christians are weird, not interested in normal things like sport, business, family etc. that they are judgmental, boring and don't know how to have fun. Prove them wrong – and guide your group to do the same.

2) Remind your group that people on all places on the spiritual spectrum will be there: sceptics, seekers, new believers and mature believers. If you don't do this, group members often wrongly assume everyone in the room is a Christ follower and create awkward conversation moments by saying things like, 'How long have you been saved?' or by talking endlessly about Christian things, and church activities. Encourage your people to be non-religious and accessible, and to stay away from jargon that can intimidate or exclude people.

3) One of the main discoveries of the well-known Alpha course is that unbelievers need to be able to express their doubts, concerns and confusions before they can receive the gospel. It is our job to create a safe, non-judgmental atmosphere for them to do this. We do not even need to respond to their doubt or objection. We just need to make them feel heard. And once they feel heard, and they get their negative emotional reactions to the church and gospel off their chest, they are usually more open to hearing the gospel.

4) **Give it time.** Again Alpha has taught us that pressure-evangelism doesn't work on modern people. Instead create a safe, non-threatening environment where they can think it through, and talk it through over several weeks with people they trust and like.

5) If a Christ follower is particularly unhelpful to non-Christians present, please have the courage to kindly speak to them privately and say, 'I know you're passionate about your faith. But you're coming across to ______ in an off-putting way.' Then address what you suggest they do more of or less of in the weeks ahead.

Some common mistakes passionate but unhelpful Christians make are:

- + To speak as though everyone in the room is already a believer.
- + To use jargon that alienates non-Christians (e.g. saved, redeemed,

intercession, justify etc.)

- To speak enthusiastically of spiritual experiences which could sound quite 'weird' to non-Christians. For example, in a group with non-Christians present someone said, 'What helped me believe is the gift of tongues'. Speaking of visions, being baptized in the Spirit, all these are alienating. Not that they aren't true, but just they are too much too soon – and are off-putting to those who are weary of cult-sounding spirituality.
- + To get defensive when a non-Christian disagrees with what is said.
- + To make generalisations about someone's culture / background as it relates to faith.
- + To share convictions in an over-the-top enthusiastic way.

6) **Pray every day for the non-Christians who are coming.** Pray that God will remove the barriers to faith in their minds and heart. Pray the Holy Spirit will open their eyes.

5. HOW TO EFFECTIVELY LEAD A GROUP TIME

PREPARE WELL

- This means several things: Watch the ALPHA DVD on your own beforehand, and go through the questions suggested – and come up with some of your own.
- + Pray for your group members by name. On the day your group meets, take a few moments and pray for each member by name. You may want to review the prayer list at least once a week. Ask God to use your time together to touch the heart of every person in your group. Expect God to lead you to whomever he wants you to encourage or challenge in a special way. If you listen, God will surely lead.
- + **Prepare a good meeting place.** The place should be tidy. Cut out possible distractions. Arrange the chairs in a circle with nothing in between people. Make sure the DVD has been pre-tested. Perhaps the DVD room can be a different room to the discussion room, or they can be the same.

ENLIST OTHERS

+ Build ownership by planning for each week (with the use of a roster) 1) whose place you meet in (although we suggest keep the meeting place the same for the duration of the 7 weeks), 2) who organizes food.

- + Perhaps even **use other facilitators** occasionally. You may be perfectly capable of hosting each time, but you will help others grow in their faith and gifts if you give them opportunities to host the group. (Be sure to lend them this manual to equip them to facilitate).
- Others are there to help you. Pray right now for God to help you build a healthy team. If you can enlist a co-host or support leader to help you with the group, you will find your experience much richer. This is your chance to involve as many people as you can in building a healthy group. All you have to do is ask people to help. You'll be surprised at the response.

BE WARM, BE YOURSELF

- Be friendly and be yourself. God wants to use your unique gifts and temperament. Be sure to greet people at the door with a big smile. This can set the mood for the whole gathering. Remember, they are taking as big a step to show up! People don't care how much you know till they know how much you care. So, care.
- Don't try to do things exactly like another host; do them in a way that fits you. Admit when you don't have an answer and apologize when you make a mistake. Your group will love you for it and you'll sleep better at night.

WORK ON YOUR DISCUSSION FACILITATION SKILLS

- + Remember to ask open-ended questions that draw out people's feelings and opinions. Stay away from conversation-ending yes-no questions.
- + When you ask a question, be patient. Someone will eventually respond. Sometimes people need a moment or two of silence to think about the question. If silence doesn't bother you, it won't bother anyone else. After someone responds, affirm the response with a simple "thanks" or "great answer." Then ask, "How about somebody else?" or "Would someone who hasn't shared like to add anything?" Be sensitive to new people or reluctant members who aren't ready to say, pray, or do anything. If you give them a safe setting, they will blossom over time. If someone in your group is a "wall flower" who sits silently through every session, consider talking to them privately and encouraging them to participate. Let them know how important they are to you—that they are loved and appreciated, and that the group would value their input.

Remember to ACT:

- Acknowledge their contribution, responding to their words as well as tears, sighs, laughter. "That is a great question." "That is a very thoughtful insight." "I can see that you feel strongly about that." Affirm people when they do say something, even if it is small.
- 2) Clarify what is being said: "Is this what you are asking / saying?"
- 3) Take it to the group: "What do you guys think?"
- Don't dominate the conversation, rather get other people to do the talking (since your role is to facilitate not teach). The person presenting on the Alpha DVD is the teacher, you are the facilitator.
- Gently ask the dominant people to make space for the others to share. (An example would be to say something like, 'Bruce, you have lots of cool ideas, hold on to some of them for now I would love to hear what others have to say.')
- + Bring the conversation on track if it steers away from the theme of the night for more than a minute. Say, 'Let's come back to the question.'
- Keep the pace moving. Don't let the conversation go on for longer than 45 minutes, though 30 minutes is enough! Though a few people may be contributing, many will start feeling fatigued.

BREAK INTO SMALLER GROUPS OCCASIONALLY

- With a greater opportunity to talk in a small circle, people will connect more with the questions, apply more quickly what they're learning, and ultimately get more out of their small group experience. A small circle also encourages a quiet person to participate and tends to minimize the effects of a more vocal or dominant member.
- + Small circles are also helpful during prayer time (though always assure people that they do not have to pray in the groups). People who are unaccustomed to praying aloud will feel more comfortable trying it with just two or three others.
- The other great aspect of sub-grouping is that it fosters leadership development. As you ask people in the group to facilitate discussion or to lead a prayer circle, it gives them a small leadership step that can build their confidence.

6. SUPPORT FOR HOSTS AND POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

A. WHAT SUPPORT CAN I EXPECT?

Each host of a temporary group will be allocated a coach. The coach will be an elder or deacon who is skilled in small group leadership. They will make contact with you regularly, but you are certainly encouraged to contact them at any time.

THEIR ROLE?

- + To pray for your success.
- + To support and encourage you during this time.
- + To problem-solve with you, and to give advice as needed.

B. HOW CAN I KNOW THAT I SHOULD CONTINUE AS A GROUP?

It is one of our hopes that many, if not most, of the temporary Life Groups will continue on after the 7 weeks, and will ultimately become a permanent small group. But there is no pressure on the group or the leader to do so. Even if the group only lasts 7 weeks we will still delight in the fact that the host set out to do exactly what we asked of them.

The signs that your group will continue on after this time are:

- + The host enjoys the experience, and is willing to continue.
- + Enough people in the group enjoyed the experience, and are willing to continue.
- The coach feels the group is healthy enough to succeed in the long run.
- + The host is willing to do the next Small Group Leaders Training

Note: the decision of whether you will continue should be reached by week 5 or 6.

C. HOW CAN I SUCCESSFULLY CONTINUE ON AS A GROUP?

One major key to continuing on is to have another series immediately after More to Life that is equally engaging to the people in the group. This series must also provide some decent Life Group material.

Assuming you and the coach agree on continuing, confidently put the idea to group to continue another series, and tell them what the next series will be (i.e will your group join with the Sunday Resurrection series on and the corresponding group guides that come with it, or will you start another DVD based course such as PJ Smyth's Gospel Revolution, Tim Keller's Gospel in Life, Mark Discol's Vintage Jesus or Rick Warren's Purpose Driven Life)

If, however, your group decides not to continue perhaps there are people who participated in the group who are now keen to join a permanent small group. If so, please let your coach know, and together with them help to connect them to a suitable permanent group.

LIFE GROUP SESSIONS

The aim of this guide is to provide you with practical tips and suggestions to help you host your life group effectively. Obviously, the discussion questions will not be necessary if the conversation arises naturally. You will probably only use one per topic and hope that the conversation flows from there. The questions are intended to be as open and non-threatening as possible. These are only suggestions so use any method or questions that you find helpful.

HELPFUL GENERAL QUESTIONS:

- + How did you respond to tonight's talk?
- + What did you feel about tonight's talk?
- + What did you think about tonight's talk?
- + Did anything that was said tonight particularly speak to you or surprise you?
- + What issues were raised for you by tonight's talk?
- + Is this a new subject for anyone?

WEEKLY DISCUSSIONS

| WEEK | SUNDAY MESSAGE TITLE | LIFE GROUP CONTENT ALPHA DVD TITLE |
|------|--|--|
| 1 | NA | Campaign Launch in homes: Is there more to life? 6/7/8th Feb |
| 2 | What Jesus said about life (John 3&4) 11th Feb | Who was Jesus? 13/14/15th Feb |
| 3 | What Jesus said about himself (John 8 and the I Am's) 18th Feb | Why did Jesus have to die? 20/21/22nd Feb |
| 4 | What Jesus said about his death (John 12:20-36) 25th Feb | How can I have faith? 27/28/29th Feb |
| 5 | What Jesus said about suffering (John 9 – Start of John 10) 4th March | How can I resist evil? 6/7/8th March |
| 6 | What Jesus said about the Holy Spirit (John 14:12-31) 11th March | Who is the Holy Spirit? 13/14/15th March |
| 6 | What does the | 17th March Holy Spirit do? be filled? |
| 7 | What Jesus said about his church (John 20. Mission.Presence.Message) 18th March | Celebration Dinner 20/21*/22 March |

*note that the 21st March is a holiday, but still a great day to have the celebration dinner.

SUGGESTED STRUCTURE FOR THE EVENING:

The general flow is the following:

- + SNACK/MEAL TIME: 15 30 min Think of a question that will open up conversation about people's weeks/day and get them connecting.
- + DVD TIME: 25 30 min Watch the ALPHA DVD.
- + CONVERSATION TIME: 30-45 min based on questions provided below. This time allows people to reveal where they are spiritually, ask questions, share contributions and learn together. The questions are generally open-ended in order to spark conversation. We have provided you with some suggestions but feel free to adjust to your group if you feel you can improve on them.
- + **PRAYER TIME: 5-min.** At the end, the group prays. In the first few weeks we suggest just one to two people pray (maybe pre-ask 1-2 people), but by the end we gently coach more people to pray aloud. However, it is imperative that no one is pressured to pray!
- + WRAP UP AND REMINDERS: 3-min reminder time where announcements and planning happens.

WEEKLY QUESTIONS

WEEK 1 | IS THERE MORE TO LIFE THAN THIS?

- What brought you here tonight?
- What did you feel about the talk?
- Has anything changed in how you view life's meaning as you watched?

WEEK 2 | WHO IS JESUS?

- Before you heard the talk tonight, what was your concept of Jesus? Has it changed? If so, in what way?
- What aspects of the evidence presented tonight did you find convincing/ not convincing?
- Who do you think Jesus is?
- If you had a chance to meet Jesus, how would you feel and what would you say to him?

WEEK 3 | WHY DID JESUS DIE?

- What is your reaction to the crucifixion?
- Do you feel that sin is an outdated concept, or is it something you can relate to?
- How do you respond to the word 'sin' and the word 'forgiveness'?
- Would you agree that sin is addictive? What do you see as the consequences of sin, if any?

WEEK 4 | HOW CAN WE HAVE FAITH?

- What would you write on a form where it asked your religion?
- Do you associate love or fear with God?
- When it is said that Christianity will make a change in your character, how do you feel?
- What does the idea of a relationship with God suggest to you?

WEEK 5 | HOW CAN I RESIST EVIL?

- Do you believe in the supernatural/black magic/the occult?
- Before tonight, did you have a concept of the devil? Has is changed?
- Why do you think bad things happen?
- Why do you think the world is in such a mess?

WEEK 6 | WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

- Before tonight, what did you think about the subject of the Holy Spirit? Has it changed?
- Were there any points that you found new or challenging as you watched?

WEEK 7 | CELEBRATORY DINNER

- What was the biggest surprise to you over the past weeks?
- What was something you found very challenging to hear?
- What was something that you tried to implement in your life?
- What are your next steps from here?

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