

“If leadership is defined by the influence you have on another, then Bobbie Houston is at the top of her game. Her longevity and credibility as a leader is only surmounted by her passion and focus to see heaven come to Earth through the extraordinary love of Christ in ordinary people. *Stay the Path* will give you invaluable insight into her miraculous journey of godly leadership.”

—**John C. Maxwell, author and leadership expert**

“Life is a daring adventure full of opportunities, obstacles, challenges, disappointments, and victories. We each have our own lane in this race we are called to run; *Stay the Path* by Bobbie Houston provides a powerful, practical, and inspirational road map on how to navigate the endless twists and turns of life so that you can fulfill your God-given destiny. Wisdom gained over decades of faithfulness, steadfastness, commitment, and tenacity is precious and priceless, and I’m grateful that Bobbie has penned these pages. She shares her journey with grace and strength, and champions us all to run our race and to finish our course. This is a book that I will keep on my bookshelf and refer to over and over again.”

—**Christine Caine, founder of A21**

“This is a very powerful message, rooted in biblical principles, that every believer can benefit from, especially with the current issues and circumstances we are facing around the world today. I’m excited to see how God is using Bobbie Houston to help strengthen Christians in their faith.”

—**Joyce Meyer, Bible teacher and bestselling author**

“A lot of people start strong, but few finish strong. If there is anyone who can teach you how to run your race and finish well, it’s Pastor Bobbie Houston. Her important new book, *Stay the Path*, is full of wisdom, warmth, and depth that will encourage you to do the right things today so you’ll end up at the right place in the future. My family is thankful for Bobbie’s example. We are different and better because we have learned from her. You will be too.”

—Craig and Amy Groeschel, pastors of
Life.Church and authors of
From This Day Forward

“With simplicity and relatable warmth, Bobbie shares some of the challenges and experiences that shaped her life as a woman in leadership at Hillsong Church. *Stay the Path* will tug at your heartstrings and challenge you to create strongholds that will help you have unshakable faith in the face of adversity.”

—Kay and Rick Warren, founders of
Saddleback Church

“Our friend Bobbie Houston is a wordsmith, and as such her book *Stay the Path* is at once poetic and prophetic. Each page of this captivating read is an invitation to weigh your life in the eternal balance and lead as the One we were told to follow would. Pastor Bobbie’s dearest desire is to see men and women, young and old, finish the course that God has laid out for them in wisdom and strength.”

—John and Lisa Bevere, founders of **Messenger International** and bestselling authors

“This is my mum. She is the most extraordinary person I know. If she were president of Earth, Earth would look a whole lot more like the kingdom of heaven. If anyone has anything to say about journey and process, it is my mum. She emits the way of Jesus like no one I know. (No offense, Dad.) But you would only be moving closer to Jesus to read this book.”

—**Joel Houston, songwriter and worship leader, Hillsong UNITED**

“We all need someone encouraging us who is just a little ahead on the journey, and my dear friend Bobbie will be that someone for you. I have been friends with Bobbie for over twenty years and have watched her live out her faith with such genuineness. Step-by-step she has been faithful to walk the leadership path she has been entrusted with. In *Stay the Path*, using her friendly yet poetic communication style, she describes challenges and victories, and at the same time gives us the practical how-to we all need as we walk the journey God has trusted us with. This is an inspirational as well as practical leadership guide. You might just need to get one for a friend too!”

—**Holly Wagner, pastor of Oasis Church and author of *Find Your Brave***

“In a generation that has elevated fame over faithfulness and temporary accolade over eternal treasure, *Stay the Path* is a much needed wake-up call. This book shakes us out of the doldrums of spiritual lethargy and snatches us from the brink of throwing in the towel. It reminds us that the virtues of honor, consistency, integrity, and longevity are still valuable and necessary. Thank you for this book, Bobbie, and for illustrating its message with a life well lived.”

—**Priscilla Shirer, Bible teacher and author**

“Experience in and of itself, is overrated. I’ve heard it said, ‘If you want to know the truth, ask somebody who has been there.’ That is only true if they have already been there EFFECTIVELY . . . that’s why I love Bobbie, that’s why I’m glad she is my pastor, and that’s why I look to her example of ‘staying on the path’ while I try to navigate my own . . . She continues to do it right! Impacting countless people on the way. There has never been a more confusing time in culture with almost endless ‘paths’ to choose from. But only one path leads to LIFE and it begins and ends with Jesus. That is the only path Bobbie has ever pointed to, has ever championed, and has ever promoted. This book will truly illuminate the RIGHT path and eliminate some wrong paths as well. One thing is for sure, I will be strategically placing this book ‘in the paths’ of many, because I don’t want to see anybody lose their way. I can’t wait to see the impact it has on those I love!”

—**Carl Lentz, lead pastor of Hillsong NYC**

“Bobbie is an inspiring leader who has not only written but lived out the reality of ‘Staying the Path’ in every aspect of her life. I highly recommend this book to anyone who desires a lasting vision for their life and ministry. I have no doubt that you will be greatly encouraged by her genuine love for the church and for God’s precious people.”

—**Joseph Prince, senior pastor of
New Creation Church**

“Bobbie Houston is the perfect model of one who has stayed on the path with Jesus. She is a woman, wife, mother, and church leader who has shown us all what God can do. Bobbie makes it look so easy but her path has been anything but. Her faith, strength, and love keep her going through every challenge. You will be encouraged and empowered by *Stay the Path*.”

—**Casey and Wendy Treat, senior pastors of
Christian Faith Center, Seattle**

“Thank you for writing this book! Bobbie Houston’s remarkable life journey has forged a treasure of wisdom and a heartfelt passion to inspire and encourage you to stay true on your own unique path in God’s purposes. Wonderfully relatable, *Stay the Path* serves up Bobbie’s signature candor and warmth, and tells of a tested but resilient faith in the God who leads her.”

—**Sy Rogers, teaching pastor and global communicator**

“Bobbie Houston is an extraordinarily faithful attendant of revelation, a devoted steward of what the Lord has entrusted to her, a passionate lover of Jesus Christ, and an unapologetic publisher of His praise—not for a couple of years or a fleeting season but year after year, decade after decade. Her longevity speaks volumes—not simply her longevity in ministry and leadership but her longevity in devotion, her longevity in servanthood, her longevity in passion and unwavering commitment to Christ, His Church, His Word, and this broken world for whom He came. I’m so grateful Bobbie has written this book—utterly grounded in reality while forward-reaching in faith—that gives all of us a glimpse into how she has so gracefully ‘stayed the path’ so that we might too.”

—**Brooke Ligertwood, songwriter and worship leader, Hillsong Worship**

“Whether you are a pathfinder or someone that is content to walk along trails that others have blazed, this book will speak to your heart. You will be encouraged, challenged, and comforted as you read these words from the heart of someone that has ‘stayed the path.’”

—**Bayless Conley, founding pastor of Cottonwood Church**

“In every generation God gifts us with those who see the big picture of what He is doing in our world. Pastor Bobbie is one of those visionaries. Not only has she walked out her calling with faithfulness, tenacity, and trust, now she shares that journey with us. God is on the move!”

—Sheila Walsh, Bible teacher and author

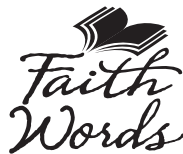
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STAY *the* PATH

Navigating the Challenges and
Wonder of Life, Love, and Leadership

• • •

Bobbie Houston



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This book is dedicated to my grandchildren—Savannah, Lexi, Bailey, Willow, Zion, Jack, and Blaze (and any more who may one day join our family) in whom I see so much life, energy, personality, potential, and wonder. While only young now, they're going to grow up and become the future influencers of society and culture.

My prayer is that those who surround them in life will live within a stunning revelation of what life is truly about, and that in doing so, they'll fuel the walk and calling of these beautiful young lives. My prayer is that they will discover the path God has purposed for them and that they'll walk with confidence and boldness.

And to Brian Houston—so much of my own insight and wisdom within these pages has been learned alongside you as we've walked this forty-year journey together. You are an exceptional husband, father, friend, Poppa, visionary leader, and shepherd soul. Thank you.

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FOREWORD

Bobbie and I are different—VERY DIFFERENT. I am full of vision, but have patience only for the headlines. I'm not sure that is a good confession; I suppose it is often a prevailing male trait. Bobbie, on the other hand, is visionary with endless patience for the details. I've heard it said that "the love is in the details." If this is true, then much of the details and excellence exemplified in our ministry is because it matters to Bobbie.

When I first laid eyes on her at a summer church convention on the east coast of New Zealand's North Island, I knew she was the one I wanted to travel life with. Her shy seventeen-year-old demeanor didn't mask a tangible love for the Savior she had just met. She had had a life-changing encounter with Christ and her wholehearted desire to serve God is what made me fall all the more in love with her.

In the early years of pioneering our ministry together, she was happy to remain behind the scenes, yet I have memories of her faithfully and tirelessly working to create a sense of "welcome home" for everyone who entered both our own home and our church home. In many ways she was the "reluctant

leader”—happy to remain in the background yet never failing to develop capacity as a woman of God and forerunner within our sphere of influence. I have loved watching God trust her to speak into the heart and soul of our ministry and steward with me the many directives that have become clear distinctives within the life of Hillsong. She has always been and remains a steadying force in our family, a compass for our—now adult—children, and a rock that we can all rely upon.

Our forty-year journey hasn't been without challenge. Like everyone, we have faced the dynamics that come with the various seasons of life and pastoring—yet it has been my wife who has found redemption along the way, and therefore beauty in the journey. Her walk might be more whimsical than mine, but her commitment and tenacity to the path are unmistakable. Any accomplishment I have achieved, or credit given to our church, has not been done outside of her capable stride and ineffable leadership gift.

The Bible says that the way is narrow that leads to life. I know personally that the road to eternity is full of bends and curves that need to be navigated with wisdom and finesse. This book documents the journey. It invites you onto the pathway and compels you to keep your eyes on the destination. Bobbie's ability to allow the Spirit of God to speak to her, and then the grace with which she gives voice to His heart, will buoy your spirit. Her ability to discern where Christ is leading, to read the faces of her fellow sojourners, and spend her traveling time wisely sets her apart to speak of the longevity that we have enjoyed. When we embarked on the journey together, I knew she was meant to be my companion on the path—but I never anticipated the capacity, depth, and partnership that would grow within and for that I am immensely proud.

There is no one that I could recommend more highly. Within these pages she will quickly gain your trust as a shepherd and a friend, and I know her revelation and wisdom will encourage you to *stay the path* for the length of your days.

Brian Houston
Founder and global senior pastor of Hillsong Church
Bestselling author of Live, Love, Lead

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ONE

IF MY JOURNEY COULD TEACH YOU ANYTHING

(An Introduction)

You haven't seen anything yet, woman of God. I don't know what you do, my sister, but I sense that you are in ministry." Her hot breath on my face startled me, and her words caused a gasp to ripple through the crowd.

Blank page, full heart, and a lifetime of experience—where do I begin to articulate with precision what has been of *defining revelation* to me personally, in order that it will be of interest and defining revelation to you? What could I possibly say that will resonate with your world and add to your well-being and success? I'm sure every writer, leader, or creative soul with similar "blank-page" and uncharted opportunity has felt the same.

Legacy is a noble concept. In essence it's about leaving a story of insight and wisdom for others—for those you deeply love (such as friends, family, and children) and for those who look

to you for example, leadership, and influence. Therefore (chin cupped in hand, elbow on desk, and eyes gazing heavenward), at the risk of talking to myself in order to talk with you, what convictions have shaped my journey and kept it fiercely real? What pivotal moments have kept me on course when territory, terrain, and enemies have proven challenging? What prevailing grace has watered the love affair of my life and never failed—and what timeless truths have kept me sure-footed and secure on a path that is both unique and yet not uncommon to all?

TRUE FROM START TO FINISH

I guess if I were author and pastor Rick Warren, I would begin with “It all starts with God, and it’s not about you,” a world-famous statement from what has become a world-famous book. If I were the one who penned the book of Genesis, I would begin with the most definitive statement ever committed to paper: “In the beginning, *God*.” And if I were the beloved Apostle who wrote the Gospel of John, I would begin with “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Eugene Peterson in the Message paraphrase frames this same gospel introduction like this:

Everything was created through him; nothing—not one thing!—came into being without him. What came into existence was Life, and the Life was *Light to live by*. The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness; the darkness couldn’t put it out . . . The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes,

the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, *true from start to finish*. (John 1:3–5, 14 MSG; emphasis mine)

True from start to finish. True from beginning to end. Life that was (and is) light to live by. Now there's a brilliant place to begin, and a brilliant reality worth aspiring to. Imagine having such words spoken of *your* life. Imagine it being said of you—*they lived true from start to finish!* They discerned the mystery of life and lived true to who they were. They discovered the unique reason of their existence and lived true to their *distinctive passage* through time and history.

The reality of life, dear friend, is both profound and yet simple. Everything “under the sun” (see Eccles. 1:9 NIV) has beginning and end, start and finish. Everything has a source of (true) origin with the intent of (true) purpose, completion, and fulfillment—yet it is what happens in between, along that journey from beginning to finish line, that is of paramount importance. I heard it said that the “dash” (or line) between a person's birth date and passing date is vitally important because it reveals both the reality and measure of that life. As grand and romantic as “purpose” and “destiny” sound—neither are *destinations* guaranteed with the blast of the starting gun or that first step out into the unknown adventure of what lies ahead. It's what happens thereafter that truly matters—and anyone with any degree of longevity to humbly boast of will agree.

I am neither Pastor Rick Warren (surprise, surprise) nor one of the original and ancient Apostles who recorded the timeless Word of God that has shaped humankind down through the ages. However, I am a trustworthy friend present in our here and

now, seeking to be obedient and helpful with the writing of this book.

My hope is to lay out, with simplicity and relatable warmth, some of the markers of wisdom and experience that have shaped my life as a woman in leadership alongside my husband, Brian, and within the now many-layered story of Hillsong. I don't pretend to have life completely figured out, but I do have some distance that can be drawn upon—distance that now includes thousands of people around the world and that runs several generations deep.

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon (the privileged son of psalmist King David) has a life-changing epiphany. Like many a human soul, he questions life and for a moment has a mini meltdown, vacillating between wisdom and despondency. Regardless of fame, fortune, and insane creative talent, it all pales into apparent nothingness for him, because without a sense of *true reason and true direction* it feels shallow and futile. For ten chapters Solomon ponders, pontificates, and agonizes, until wisdom prevails and trumps the despondency. He then makes several remarkable statements—one being that “the writing of many books is endless,” and that if we are not careful, the study of too many words outside of the words of the one true Shepherd will merely produce weariness of body and soul (see Eccles. 12 AMP).

That little verse in the Old Testament is a personal measuring rod for me as I find myself in this new season of writing. My only desire with this book you hold in your hands is to give worthy expression to the goodness of the one true Shepherd who has journeyed with me through life and landscape, and who wishes to do the same for you. As Psalm 23 teaches, He is the Good Shepherd who leads and guides, prods and protects, as we

travel with him from what is beginning to end. The mere fact that God is called Alpha and Omega, Beginning and End, is a rather brilliant clue that He knows what is best and most advantageous for all of us.

This remarkable Shepherd King teaches us how to handle the challenges and face the enemies. His words have the capacity to help us discern prevailing conditions and frame the seasons of life with wisdom. They show us how to rest and find ease, and yet also how to contend and war for what is noble and upright. It is the words of Christ that make us great, and it is His wisdom that secures our passage through life . . . and it is “safe passage through life” that endlessly defines my own passion (and maternal heart) as a pastor and shepherd within His church and kingdom.

MY HEART AND PRAYER

For those unfamiliar with my voice, I have been a Christ follower for more than forty years and a lover of the Lord Jesus since the moment He knocked on the door of my heart at fifteen. I have three adult children, each married to a fabulous partner, and at the time of penning this, we have seven cute grandbabies. I’ve had the magnificent honor of being in ministry alongside my husband, Brian, for over four decades, and in that time (pastoring an expansive global church) we’ve navigated some insane, crazy, scary, and wonderful territory together. My simple desire for this book, *Stay the Path*, is to share some of the truths that have kept us on course, on point, and focused on the path before us.

So this book comes to you with much love, heart, and affection.

My prayer is that if my journey has taught me anything, it may also teach and add to your experience. The Bible says that there is nothing new under the sun, but each and every day there are lessons to be learned and new applications of truth to be made. It's the voices of past, present, and future that teach us. The ancients of long ago have certainly left their legacy to glean from—and of course, the prophetic voices of old (that reach into and salt the future) are timeless. They echo into our here and now, and they draw us onward. Yet there are also many trustworthy voices alongside us now with perspective and experience worth listening to.

So as I launch out with “blank page, full heart,” I am reminded of a milestone moment twenty years ago, a milestone moment that I repeatedly woke with in the dawn hours leading into beginning this book, and a moment that I believe the Spirit of God strategically brought back into view from the late nineties.

A MILESTONE MOMENT

It had been a full and busy day. In that season, I was navigating a young teenage family, a vibrant and rapidly expanding church, a lovely (yet crazy) visionary husband, and the very first aspects of a “God-whisper” that would become an all-consuming passion to this very day. (The God-whisper story is within my book *The Sisterhood*.)

For some reason, circumstances that day had been against me attending what was a retreat not far from where we lived on the outskirts of Sydney. However, that afternoon those circumstances changed. I organized my kids, and I found myself with a girlfriend racing out into the countryside to the campsite setting

of this small but important conference. Not wanting to be a distraction, my friend and I quietly slipped into the meeting of not more than two hundred women and sat a few rows back from the front.

I can't recall many details of the night, except the fact that I probably should have been on the front row supporting this retreat, because my husband was "State Leader" of this denominational movement at the time. That aside, the invited guest speaker decided to pray for all the key leaders at the end of her message. With others, I walked to the front and stood (almost in the shadows) at the far end to the right.

As I closed my eyes in prayer, the speaker was at the complete other end. A lengthy row of fabulous women separated us, and if this woman intended to pray for each of us individually, then I would have been the last one she would have gotten to. As my heart leaned heavenward, I suddenly felt hot breath on my face. "The woman" was suddenly in front of me. Hot breath. For a split second I was confused. But before I had time to process another thought, she was declaring these exact and powerful words over my life: "You haven't seen anything yet, woman of God. I don't know what you do, my sister, but I sense that you are in ministry."

A gasp rippled through the audience. She was correct. I *was* in ministry. Brian and I led the state movement, and our Hillsong church had for some reason become the fastest growing in the nation. In the months ahead, when I was still happy to remain in the shadows, Brian would be elected as national president of that same movement. It was obvious this woman ministering had no idea of our role or influence, hence the murmur and sudden intrigue of what was about to be spoken over my life.

With uncanny prophetic clarity, authority, and emotion she began to declare words that I have never forgotten, words that framed the very heartbeat and core of our ministry, words that carried truth then, and even more so twenty years on: “I heard the Lord say that you have plowed up hard ground, you’ve paved the way. Many have come along, and they have taken away pieces of the thing that you labored over, you worked over, you sought over, you cried over, you prayed over, the very thing that you birthed, and when you saw them come and take pieces away, you said, ‘I bless them with it, Lord. They don’t take anything. I give it to them, I give it to them.’ And because you have, the anointing that is in the house has gone around the world, but you and the man of God have not yet seen anything.”

My heart and mind were reeling. She continued, “The Lord says, ‘Daughter, you have built and built again and built again, but go home and tell the man of God, you are going to build again. You are going to build again. You made room for two thousand and then you made room for five thousand, but I said there needs to be room for twelve thousand,’ says the Lord. Twelve thousand, for they will come from around the world to see the glory that is in the house.

“I have made your husband a man of truth. He loves truth at whatever the cost, and people either love him for it or they get mad at him for it, but he will not settle for anything less than truth, and because of his love for truth, I have allowed him to go to the next level of my anointing and my grace and my glory.

“Write the book, woman of God, write the book, write the book, write the book, write the book—make a recording of what you have birthed in the house so that it will be a training

manual for those who have lost their hope. Write the book, woman of God, and your children, it shall be a memorial for them to follow. For children, children, children shall know your God and they shall not follow the voice of a stranger and they will not know rebellion, but they will know My grace, My glory, My word, My song..."

And then the voice of this preacher woman broke with emotion—it was as though you could hear the affection of the Father in her words: "My song, My song, My song is in your house, My song is in your house. You built my house, now I'm going to build your house. You built my house, I'm going to build your house, and I will settle over it, and it won't just be something that you settle for, but it will be grander than what you've even desired. So I say, woman of God, thou hast done well with my anointing."

Okay. Personal words and personal promises are exactly that—they're personal. However, these words spoken on a tranquil evening in April 1997, in the rolling green countryside of northern Sydney, have affected not only my life but many others also. My prayer is that by the time we get to the closing chapters of this book, they will have shaped your world in some way also. They're words that have influenced not only our own natural children but also the many "spiritual children" within our church and ministry—including those who have poured through our leadership conferences and college over the years. As we have collectively leant into and experienced His grace, glory, word, and song, many have gone on to salt the Body of Christ around the world as a new breed of kingdom builders. The "song" she spoke of has become the arrowhead of a greater message about the cause of Christ and His passion for people, with our worship and music ministering to millions.

My husband has proven to be “a man of truth”—and as prophesied, some have hated him for it but multitudes have loved him for it. And if I can say this with humility of heart, our ministry has “paved a way” and cut a path for others to follow. The hard ground plowed has created a slipstream within the broad and diverse Body of Christ, allowing many to fast-track themselves into God’s purpose and blessing for their lives.

The remarkable thing about those unexpected words of encouragement that evening was that, in the car driving to that campsite, I had been telling my friend how I had written my first book (*I’ll Have What She’s Having*) and had put it in a drawer nine months earlier because I felt awkward about it. Who was I to write a book? What did I have to bring to the table? How embarrassing! And then, an hour or so later, I’m standing on an altar with a wild and yet endearing woman who is declaring (with hot breath) that I should write the book that I had actually hidden away because of lack of confidence.

So as I begin, I share these words from 1997 because one of the mandates upon this little heart of mine is to “make a recording of what has been birthed in the house” in order that it become (as the woman prophesied) a memorial for others to follow and a training manual for those who have lost hope. I have no personal ambition outside of this, and I certainly know that I am not the only voice speaking to this current generation. My only desire is to be true to what Jesus has allowed me to be a part of and, with openhandedness, to offer any wisdom gained. After all, those words did say that as we have lived with open hand and generous heart, the anointing upon the house has gone out and around the world and influenced the way many approach modern-day Christianity and church.

COSTLY EXPERIENCE

So despite still feeling like a twenty-year-old in my head, my prayer is that the costly experience of my little sixty-year journey (thus far) will provide comfort, courage, and hope for others. I know you will agree that we each have only one life and it passes like a vapor. So, dear one—if *my journey could teach you anything*—if my life could add anything to yours, if my story can help you “stay the path” and fulfill all that is upon your life and eternal destiny, then the following pages hold a portion of what I would say to you.

I pray that you will hear the heart of God within my words, because as Solomon declared, “There is no end to the writing of books” (see Eccles. 12:12 NIV; paraphrase mine). None of us have time for human wisdom only. We all need divine wisdom, which issues from above and is perfect in every circumstance and season of life, enabling good success across the entire spectrum of our lives. As the psalmist says in Proverbs:

My son [or daughter], be attentive to my wisdom [godly wisdom learned by *actual and costly experience*], and incline your ear to my understanding [of what is becoming and prudent for you], that you may exercise proper discrimination and discretion and your lips may guard and keep knowledge and the wise answer [to temptation].
(Proverbs 5:1 AMP; paraphrase and emphasis mine)

The destination is too precious to be compromised, so turn the page with me and allow a little lady from a land Down Under in Australia to share elements of what “the path” has taught her thus far. As we begin, allow me to pray for you.

“Father, thank you for the one holding this book, and that our lives are colliding within these pages. May the stories and words shared instill strength, hope, and endless courage. Thank you for this fabulous adventure called Life, thank you that we are not alone, that we are here to encourage and cheer one another on. Draw near, dear Holy Spirit, enable, teach, and equip us for all that lies ahead. Travel with us, Lord. We humbly commit our path and way to you. Amen.”

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