

# The Navigator



The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's

Volume X, No. 4 — Fall 2015

## A Disciplined Faith: Simplicity

Fr. Alan Andraeas, Prior

*"Whom have I in heaven but You?  
And having You, I desire nothing upon the earth."  
Psalm 73:25*

As you can imagine, the interior disciplines (meditation, prayer, fasting, and study) are those ancient Christian practices that aid in quelling the "brute beast" within us (Psalm 73:22) by targeting, chipping away, and mortifying various aspects of 'self' in order to promote the sovereignty of Jesus Christ. And as the name implies, the interior disciplines tend to impact those things that other people can't see; things known only to God (Psalm 94:11; Hebrews 4:12; cf., Matthew 9:4). We've taken the last four newsletters to examine each one of these disciplines in turn and I hope you are encouraged to introduce these disciplines into your own exercise of intentional faith and devotion.

Now it is time to examine the exterior disciplines. Saint Brendan's *Rule of Life* focuses on six of them: simplicity, solitude, submission, service, purity, and temperance. Let's begin with simplicity.

At its core, simplicity is the outward reflection of one's inner state of being. In practice, simplicity is how we lay aside those things that can clutter or interfere with a life of devotion and consecration. When our inner man and outer man are unified as one through simplicity and yielded as a gift to Christ, He

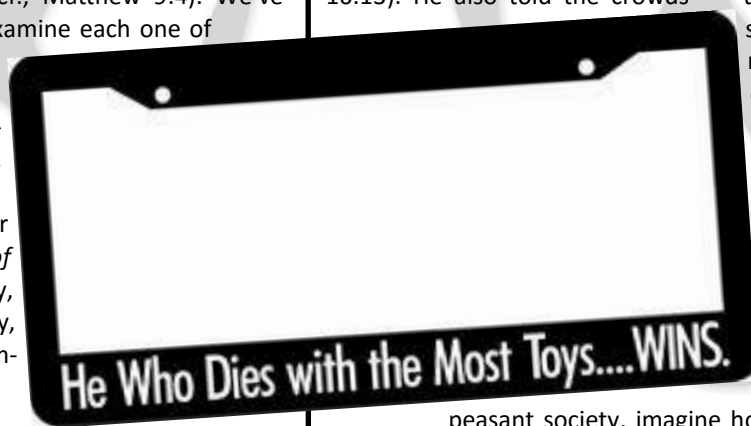
reciprocates that gift with freedom, contentment, joy, and balance. The result is a heaven-sent liberation from the insane and insatiable attachments to things, status, influence, and affluence which this world says are so necessary for our happiness. And since simplicity often refers to *stuff*, it seems like a good place to start. [Sue's article concentrates on the faith and belief side of simplicity—you may even want to read that one first!]

Have you ever seen the license plate frame that says "He who dies with the most toys wins"? Have you ever seen it on sporty, expensive cars? I have, on the I-395 beltway around Washington, DC. I suppose that's the contemporary version of the older expression, "Keeping up with the Jones'." Jesus had some rather poignant things to say about stuff. He declared that materialism (Aramaic, *mammon*) was a rival god in one's life (Luke 16:13). He also told the crowds

that our lives do not consist of—and are not measured by—the abundance of our possessions (Luke 12:15). I think it's interesting to note that Jesus spoke more about personal economics than any other social issue; and if He spoke about how these things could snare folks living in a

peasant society, imagine how much more seriously we need to take His words to heart in our materially-driven culture!

So what's the answer? Do we start holding yard sales and giving our things to thrift stores? Not necessarily. You see, a hyper-



## IN THIS ISSUE OF "THE NAVIGATOR"

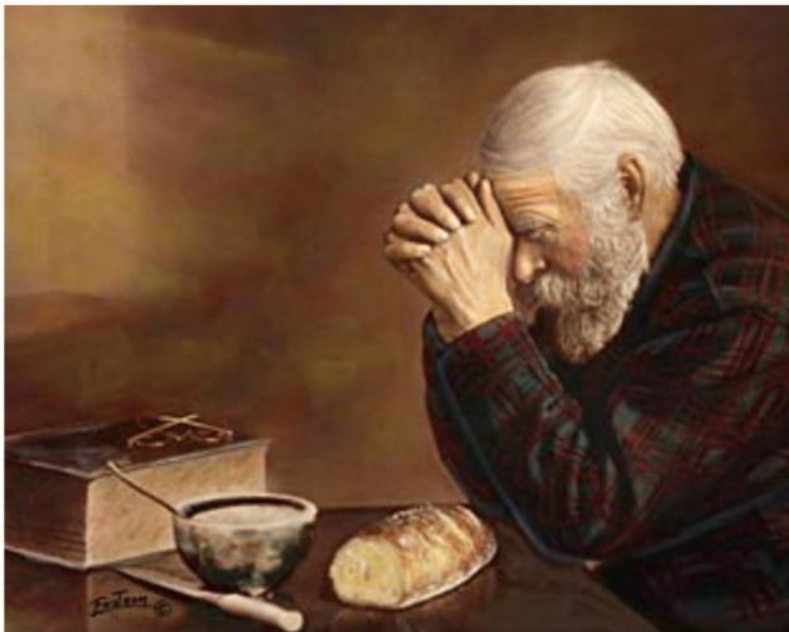
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ordered life with a perfect, minimalist, *feng shui*-esque house may not reflect God's plan for us, either. That's because, apart from the Lord, simplicity can also become a crippling legalism that can kill or inflate the one's spirit. Authentic simplicity must, first and foremost, be knit to the heart of God. And in a very practical sense, true simplicity begins by believing that He will not leave us without adequate provision (Deuteronomy 8:7-9). Of course, our definition of 'adequate' must be based on the mind of Christ and not on the relentless din of popular marketing. Advertising experts on Madison Avenue are more than happy to tell us what we want to have, but Christ alone knows what we need to have; He knows what we require for our "daily bread" (Matthew 6:11; Luke 12:22-34).

**"If heaven and Christ's righteousness are our true passions, then we will discover the blessing of how little of earth's tangible goods we need to be happy"**

into our lives. Viewed this way, simplicity becomes a biblical life-orientation that allows the Holy Spirit to manage our possessions in order that we're not ruled or destroyed by them.

It's no wonder that simplicity is the most visible of our spiritual disciplines; it stands directly opposed to our prevailing culture's wasteful, throw-away, gluttonous lifestyle (did you know that our obsessive penchant for recreational shopping can actually turn into psychological disorder, *pleonexia*?!). The best way to demonstrate this simplicity is by pursuing the kingdom of heaven as our first and foremost possession. When others see our lives turned toward heaven, they will also see God's faithfulness in making sure that everything we need for our wellbeing comes to us in its proper measure (Matthew 6:33). In fact, if heaven and Christ's righteousness are our true passions, then we will discover the blessing of how little of earth's tangible goods we need to be happy. You may even find that the Holy Spirit grants you a joyful *lack of interest* for possessions—the truest of liberties which allows us to trust in God's faithfulness for our full contentment.



This kind of biblical simplicity can be characterized by three inner attitudes toward the material world:

- That what we have is a gift from God, even if our hands have labored to acquire it.
- That our relationship with our possessions needs to be one of stewardship, not ownership.
- That our possessions are to be held with an 'open hand,' being made available to others who can benefit from their use.

These define the inner reality of simplicity and reflect Jesus' words, "Do not be anxious" (Luke 12:22; cf., Philippians 4:6). They also set the parameters for our outward practice.

"But I don't know if I could handle a life of bare-bones austerity." Did I say austerity? True, there are some exceptional individuals whom God calls to live in holy poverty and asceticism, but that's not His call for everybody. Even St. Paul said that he learned how to live in a state of plenty (Philippians 4:12). Actually, our call to intentional disciplined faith gives us the privilege of offering to the world an outward example of Christlikeness in a consumer-crazed society; an example of ongoing, thoughtful prudence in deciding what and how much we bring

## MONASTIC MUSE

**muse** \ 'myüz \ 1: *vb* to turn something over in the mind meditatively, 2: to think reflectively, 3: *n* a state of deep thought...

**The holy Church of the Elect starts on the path of simplicity and completes that path in charity.**

—St. Gregory the Great (c. 540/604 AD)

What should someone's *practice* of simplicity look like? God has set each of us in different places and in different stations of life. My practice won't look like your practice, and your practice won't look like your friend's practice. But there are some basic principles that can help to govern the external life of a consecrated believer. Here are several for your consideration:

- Acquire what you need based on its usefulness and utility, not for its promise of status or prestige. If people are to be impressed by anything, they should be impressed with your life in Christ and not with your stuff.
- Use things until they are worn or are no longer serviceable or repairable.
- Consider all the things you can do for yourself. Can you make by hand the things that you would normally purchase, like clothes? Can you cook from scratch at a fraction of the cost what you would normally spend on pre-cooked or frozen meals? Can you obtain a simple lawn mower and cut your own grass (and perhaps that of your neighbor's) rather than hiring a lawn service?
- Do you buy things for the purpose of brand name recognition or for the function of the item? John Wesley once wrote, "[When it comes to] apparel, I buy the most lasting and, in general, the plainest I can. In the same fashion, I buy no furniture but what is necessary and cheap."

You see, if we acquire things simply to impress others, to feed our needs, to accumulate bigger and better, or to increase our level of ease (and remember, ease is not the same as peace and contentment), then we are still governed by the consumer demons of our society.

One good corrective to this very 'American' way of life is to balance what we accumulate with the things we get rid of. What should go first? Those things in our lives that are based on addictions. An addiction doesn't need to take the form of sugar, caffeine, alcohol, or drugs. It can be the 200+ satellite channels that pour into our TVs. It can be the need for whatever's on display in the window of our favorite boutique, from the cutest sandals to the latest Bluetooth gadget. It can even be that particular flavor of soft drink stocked by the case inside your back door or the internet news feeds that you constantly monitor 24 hours a day. Each one of these might be a controlling factor in your life, and if that's the case then a prayerful surrender of these things is certainly advised. Ask God to free you from such burdens because they may act as an allegiance to



something other than God (remember Jesus' words about *mammon*?).

Another consideration for simplicity is the idea of de-accumulation. This is not the same thing as getting rid of the



things that control us. Rather, de-accumulation is giving up or giving away those things we have too much of or no longer need. Most of us could probably give away half the things in our homes—furniture, clothes, shoes, kitchen gadgets, stereos, televisions—and not experience any great sacrifice. That is a major indicator of our need for simplicity.

Finally, simplicity should also govern the intangible things in our lives; things like our speech. For example, we don't want lives characterized by our "much speaking" (Matthew 6:7) no matter what form it takes. Phones, email, social media, Skype, text messages; how much is godly, how much is idle, how much is injurious or laced with gossip, how much of it flatters, how much of it controls, and how much of it is a reflection of our own internal chaos and clutter? Like every other area in our lives, we should practice an "economy of diction" with our mouths. Or as Jesus said when He raised the issue of plain speech with His disciples: "Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil" (Matthew 5:37).

Finally guard yourself by shunning anything that deters you from seeking first the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). Excessive attention given to things that, on the surface, may be perfectly fine can eventually become the center of your world, distracting you from that which is of first importance: the imitation of Christ. If you would like to see what St. Benedict said about simplicity, I would encourage you to study chapters 33 and 55 of his *Rule*. And to get you thinking ahead, the next issue of *The Navigator* will examine the external discipline of solitude. ✕

Rejoice!  
Fr. Alan Andraeas

**K.I.S.S.:**  
**Keep It Simple, Saints!**  
Sue Andraeas

*Jesus answered and said to them,  
“This is the work of God, that you believe  
in Him whom He sent.”  
John 6:29.*

We humans are an odd lot. Collectively, we would prefer if our needs were met quickly, cheaply, and easily—and we’ll work long and hard and spare no expense to make it so. We could explore this trend in nearly any facet of any industrialized society and find that the ‘quick, cheap, and easy’ has driven public policy, economics, medicine, invention, and advertising of goods and services, and even—believe it or not—Christian faith. But let’s just look at one ‘secular’ example before we take a closer spiritual look.

Let’s pretend that today was more hectic than most, and now its dinner time. We, at least in America, are prone to take one of two courses of action: either we go to a restaurant, or we reach for something ‘quick and easy’ to make from our own kitchen—probably something frozen that we can just throw in the microwave. Easy to fix. Easy to clean up. But *is* it easy? Let’s pretend our ‘quick and easy’ meal is a frozen burrito; pull one from the freezer, plopping it on a paper plate, toss it in the microwave and, after we’re done eating, throw the plate into the trash. Easy. BUT... is it *simple*? No!

First off, you have to have a freezer, something that the majority of people on earth do not have! You also need a microwave or oven—something else few people on earth have. You need electricity to power both of these appliances. You need someone to deliver the burrito to your grocery store—probably from far away. You need someone to haul away the plastic wrapper and paper plate that you no longer want. But it goes even beyond that. WHO actually made your burrito? How many ‘servants’ did it require to grow the beans or process the meat in your burrito?



*Well, migrant workers actually work for you, don’t they? You ‘hire’ them every time you make food purchases that encourage their exploitation. Exploitation? Well, do YOU know anyone who aspires to be a migrant worker? Have you ever met one? I have, and they work very hard for next to nothing! They do it because we have created a system that requires them to remain poor and hard-working. Same goes for most of the people who work in meat processing plants. Even our American ‘small farmers’ are becoming extinct because we demand cheap food.*

We have not even considered the environmental consequences of ‘cheap meat’ or ‘cheap (subsidized) crops,’ or the incredible suffering of the cows, pigs and chickens before becoming your ‘cheap’ dinner. (I’ll let it to you verify these claims on your own; call or email if you want some suggestions as to where to begin). We could follow the same alarming path as we analyze the effects of ‘cheap’ clothing, ‘cheap’ household goods, etc... At the end of each chain is poverty and exploitation, not something we as Christians should be causing, I would say.

“Easy” and “simple” are not synonyms. This is a topic that, for me, began from the earliest days of Saint Brendan’s formation. Due to our very limited funds that first year, I looked for ways to cut costs at every turn: how to make a \$40/month grocery budget feed the 2 of us plus retreatants; how to do a load of laundry for under 5 cents (my gratitude to Jan Meeks for her help in this



**“A child lets God be God! After all, He created all that was—all by Himself... without our help.”**

project!), and how to keep the electric bill below \$100/month while renovating the dilapidated retreat house—the power tools ran hours a day that first summer. The following year, I was asked to be the keynote speaker at a 3-day women’s retreat. The topic? Simplicity. That’s how long ago Alan and I began our spiritual exploration of this topic.

“Easy” means not strenuous. “Simple” means not complex. “Easy,” as we have just seen above, is usually complex, much more complex than we take time to notice. “Simple” is usually much more work, and while it is more liberating and beneficial on many levels, it is not what we sinful humans strive for. Let’s look at this now from Christ’s perspective. After all, we are supposed to be a group of individuals seeking to live a more godly disciplined life. Let’s lay the ‘secular’ aside for a moment and see what God, through Scripture, has to say about all of this.

If I were to ask you what your job is as a Christian, you might be tempted to answer by explaining the role you have in your church. You’re the secretary, or the janitor, or usher, or pastor. You’re on the rectory or pastor-parish relations committee; you’re in the intercession team or choir; you teach Sunday school or a Bible study. You are in charge of missions or are the

liaison for your local food bank or free meal outreach. You have a gift of hospitality, or prophecy. You work at the homeless shelter or help with the elderly or with children. Those are all noble endeavors, but they are not what Scripture says your ‘work of God’ is all about.

John 6:29 reads: “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” The Greek word used for ‘work,’ *ergon*, means toil. ‘Believe in’ *pisteuo*, isn’t the kind of believe like ‘I believe it’s going to rain’ (which really means ‘I hope’ or ‘I think’) or ‘I believe carbon emissions create climate change’ (which really means ‘I have come to understand’). No, the belief Jesus is talking about here is more intuitive, more like ‘I believe in gravity,’ and then absolutely everything you do is naturally and unconsciously governed by the fact that you *believe* gravity will pull everything down toward the ground! Do you believe in Jesus with *that* kind of unconscious, intuitive belief? No, neither do I. Our earthly minds, polluted by sin from within and without, have to toil to accomplish that kind of



belief. But when we do toil to believe on that level, we find that his yoke is easy—not strenuous, but complex.

Actually, we’re more inclined to want a hard yoke, aren’t we? Think about poor Naaman of 2 Kings 5. He was a commander of the Syrian army—wealthy enough to have a Hebrew servant girl. (A ‘conquest of battle’ I imagine.) He also had leprosy. One day,

this little Hebrew girl told Naaman’s wife that he should go talk to Elisha, the prophet of her people. Elisha, of course, tells Naaman to go dip in the Jordan seven times, but Naaman gets all huffy. Why? Because the Jordan is just a muddy, unimpressive river and he is Naaman! He wants to do something hard, like kayak down some dangerous rapids rather than dunk a few times in a tame, muddy river. Why? Because then his healing would not simply be from God but because *he* pulled off this difficult thing that allowed God to act. He would, in effect, control God.

We Christians tend to be the same way. We don’t want to do the ‘simple’ (non-complex) thing of believing in Jesus as we believe in gravity. No, we want to do some hard thing—some monumental church activity, or some

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noteworthy ascetic discipline. We want our salvation to be because WE made it possible for God to save us. Jesus, however, tells His disciples to come to him as a little child. To a child, dipping in a muddy river is nothing, but kayaking down rapids is out of the question. A child lets God be God! After all, He created all that is—all by Himself... without our help. Think about it!

What else did Jesus tell his disciples? To care for the widows and orphans, *care for*, not just throw money at. To help the poor and needy—not just those in your view but those far away. (How can we evangelize a person we have exploited for our own ease and comfort?) Many of His parables are about stewardship, food, or economics—all of which point to non-complex simplicity. Do you believe in *this* Jesus—the one God sent—or do you believe in one who needs your complexity rather than your simplicity?

I don't know about you, but I feel like the time of 'easy' is drawing to a close. Whether you listen to ecologists, or to economists, to politicians or secular news releases or even Pope Francis, they are all saying almost the same thing: something has to give. The rich and powerful (and if you are reading this, you fit that description whether you think you do or not) cannot continue the 'quick,

cheap and easy' life at the expense of the poor and needy for too much longer without there being serious consequences.

This is not a political statement; it's a spiritual one. God made all of creation to operate under just two laws: Love the Lord with all you have; love your neighbor as yourself. And that means the fate of this planet is not based on carbon or polluted oceans or how many trees are in a rain forest. It means the fate of our planet is based on our Christian work; believing in the one whom God sent, and living your life accordingly.



It's not that easy, but it's just that simple.

I challenge you this week to really evaluate your actions to see *why* you do what you do, and what the consequences of those daily activities are—

for you, the people around you, and the people far away who are connected to you through your actions and choices. Simplicity is nothing short of your worship and adoration of Jesus Christ infiltrating every choice you make, every thought you think, and every person you come in contact with—directly or indirectly. It is the hardest of all disciplines, I think. But without it, all the others are nothing more than wanting to kayak down dangerous rapids when all you really need to do is...take the plunge.

Rejoice!

Sue Andraeas

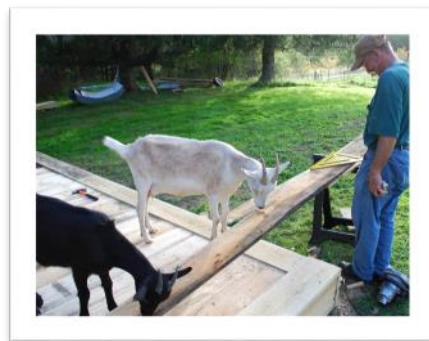
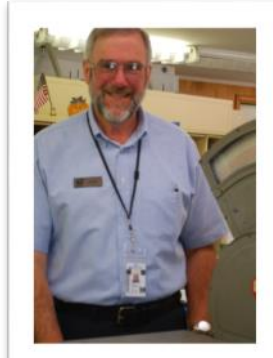
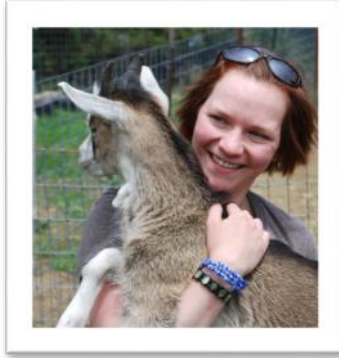
**“God made all of creation to operate under just two laws: Love the Lord with all you have; love your neighbor as yourself.”**

**'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free  
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,  
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.**

**“Tis the Gift to Be Simple” -- Text, Joseph Brackett (1797-1882); Shaker dancing song**

**SPECIAL NOTICE:** Our hearts and prayers go out to Nancy Fennell—a Friend in the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's—who recently lost her husband, George. George was also a Friend in our Fellowship and both were frequent visitors to Holy Trinity Chapel. We pray for Nancy's comfort and consolation as we commend George into the eternal care of our Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ.

# Life at Saint Brendan's

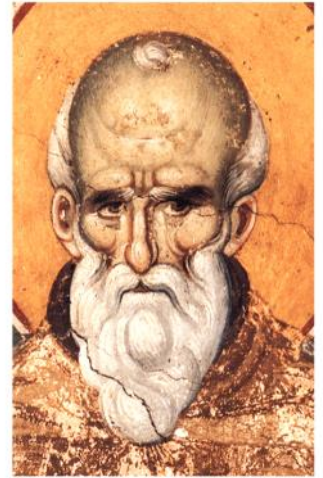


**TOP LEFT:** A young, local, nursing home staff member has her picture with our donkey as part of a photo scavenger hunt. **TOP MIDDLE (LEFT):** Our daughter-in-law, Siobhan, is introduced to our young goat buck, Lincoln. **TOP MIDDLE (RIGHT):** Fr. Alan (a bi-vocational priest) starts his new job as the postmaster of Dennysville. **TOP RIGHT:** Sue and her mother, Rowena, stop at a high cross while visiting the town of Saint Andrews, New Brunswick, Canada. **MIDDLE LEFT:** Two young future farmers, Phoebe and Megan, come to visit the animals—they loved the chickens!. **MIDDLE CENTER:** Sue (on the guitar) and a friend of ours, Kris (on the banjo), tune up for a Sunday tent meeting sponsored by Holy Trinity Chapel at a weekend farm and horse fair. **MIDDLE RIGHT:** “Chaplain Andraeas” gets ready for his role in the local Memorial Day parade by making sure his Navy khaki uniform still fits. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Charles, a cyclist from Quebec, stayed with us for several days to work in exchange for room and board as part of his round-the-world bike trip. **BOTTOM MIDDLE (UPPER):** Clay and Marcia, Friends of the Monastic Fellowship visiting from Phoenix, help Sue with our newest construction project—a Saint Brendan’s woodshop. **BOTTOM MIDDLE (LOWER):** The goats check Clay’s carpentry work. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Sue sorts through some red and white potatoes that she pulled from the garden.

## The Final Word: St. Maximus the Confessor

Theologian and Monk of Constantinople (580-662), from his book *Five Hundred Chapters*

Charity is a right attitude of mind which prefers nothing to the knowledge of God. If we possess any strong attachment to the things of this earth, we cannot possess true charity. For anyone who really loves God will prefer God over anything in His creation. The Lord Himself reminds us: "Whoever loves me will keep my commandments. And this is my commandment—that you love one another." So the one who does not love a neighbor does not obey God's command. And one who does not obey His command does not love God. Moreover, if one truly loves God, one must love one's neighbor absolutely. Such a one cannot hoard wealth. Rather, like God Himself, one must generously give from one's own resources to all according to their needs. Even more, a charitable mind is not displayed simply in giving money; it is also manifested by personal service as well as by the communication of God's word to others. In fact, if service toward the needy is genuine and if one really renounces worldly concerns, then one is freed from his own selfish desires. For Jeremiah warns us, "Do not say, 'We are the Lord's temple.'" Neither should we say, "Faith alone in our Lord Jesus Christ can save me." Faith accomplishes nothing by itself, for even the devils believe and shudder. No, faith must be joined to an active love of God which is expressed in good works. The charitable person is distinguished by sincere and long-suffering service to others; it also means using aright the things entrusted to our stewardship.



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